

LAI KING CHEW: THE COSMO CLUB AND RENO'S CHINESE COMMUNITY

Interviewee: Lai King Chew

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Interviewers: Hwa-di Brodhead and Michael Brodhead

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Description

Between 1849 and 1876 the population of Chinese immigrants coming to the U.S. swelled to 151,000. Beset by war and famine at home, the Chinese were attracted to the promise of gold in the Western United States. Called "coolies," the Chinese worked in the mines and helped to build the railroads in Nevada. Sober, thrifty, and industrious, the Chinese eventually found great resentment among the U.S. labor force, laws to keep them off the railroad work crews, and a move to limit their immigration. In the 1860s the Chinese moved into a broad range of occupations. Many became quite prosperous as merchants and restaurateurs, especially in the larger cities of San Francisco, Seattle, and Vancouver, British Columbia.

Lai King Chew's father emigrated from China to Port Townsend, Washington in 1860. He migrated to Nevada, where he worked on the railroad, then moved back to the state of Washington where he found success as a merchant and respect as an arbitrator in the Chinese community there. He hired a matchmaker to find him a wife in China and brought her to the U.S. in 1890 under false pretenses with a bought birth certificate. Together they had nine children.

Lai King Chew grew up in Seattle, was educated at St. Theresa's College in Winona, Minnesota, the College of William and Mary, and New York University, receiving a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1935. She lived in Vancouver, British Columbia with her first husband, Thomas Chang, and had two children. After divorcing, she settled in Seattle, later marrying Charlie Chew. They moved to Reno in 1956 and opened a casino for blacks and Indians, who at that time were not allowed to gamble in the clubs in Reno. Charlie Chew died suddenly in 1961, and Mrs. Chew quickly learned the gambling business and ran the club herself until 1966.

The Cosmo Club on Commercial Row was a very colorful place. Mrs. Chew's recollections well describe the wild popularity of keno, a game introduced by the Chinese to the American gambling scene. She recalls the dark and dangerous side of downtown Reno and the characters that frequented this neighborhood.

In Nevada Mrs. Chew found prejudice and discrimination for the first time in her life. She found that people of her race would not be served in some Reno restaurants, nor could they rent a nice apartment. Mrs. Chew tells of the Joss House Society and how the Chinese community took care of their own, settling disputes, providing for the unfortunate, arranging burials. She often interpreted for Chinese in legal and medical matters in Reno. Through her memories we learn of the lifestyle of the Chinese in Reno, and their close ties to their homeland and their loved ones in China.

(Continued on next page.)

Description (continued)

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Mrs. Chew also shares memories of her travels to China: first, as a little girl; again, after high school graduation; and then, several trips made between 1979 and 1992, when life in China had changed severely, due to takeovers by, first, the Japanese and then, the communists. She describes the changes in her ancestors' village and the hardships endured by relatives in China.

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An Oral History Conducted by Hwa-di Brodhead and Michael Brodhead
Edited by Victoria Ford and Kathleen Coles

University of Nevada Oral History Program

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PREFACE TO THE DIGITAL EDITION

Established in 1964, the University of Nevada Oral History Program (UNOHP) explores the remembered past through rigorous oral history interviewing, creating a record for present and future researchers. The program's collection of primary source oral histories is an important body of information about significant events, people, places, and activities in twentieth and twenty-first century Nevada and the West.

The UNOHP wishes to make the information in its oral histories accessible to a broad range of patrons. To achieve this goal, its transcripts must speak with an intelligible voice. However, no type font contains symbols for physical gestures and vocal modulations which are integral parts of verbal communication. When human speech is represented in print, stripped of these signals, the result can be a morass of seemingly tangled syntax and incomplete sentences—totally verbatim transcripts sometimes verge on incoherence. Therefore, this transcript has been lightly edited.

While taking great pains not to alter meaning in any way, the editor may have removed false starts, redundancies, and the “uhs,” “ahs,” and other noises with which speech is often liberally sprinkled; compressed some passages which, in unaltered form, misrepresent the chronicler's meaning; and relocated some material to place information in its intended context. Laughter is represented with [laughter] at the end of a sentence in which it occurs, and ellipses are used to indicate that a statement has been interrupted or is incomplete...or that there is a pause for dramatic effect.

As with all of our oral histories, while we can vouch for the authenticity of the interviews in the UNOHP collection, we advise readers to keep in mind that these are remembered pasts, and we do not claim that the recollections are entirely free of error. We can state, however, that the transcripts accurately reflect the oral history recordings on which they were based. Accordingly, each transcript should be approached with the

same prudence that the intelligent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information. All statements made here constitute the remembrance or opinions of the individuals who were interviewed, and not the opinions of the UNOHP.

In order to standardize the design of all UNOHP transcripts for the online database, most have been reformatted, a process that was completed in 2012. This document may therefore differ in appearance and pagination from earlier printed versions. Rather than compile entirely new indexes for each volume, the UNOHP has made each transcript fully searchable electronically. If a previous version of this volume existed, its original index has been appended to this document for reference only. A link to the entire catalog can be found online at <http://oralhistory.unr.edu/>.

For more information on the UNOHP or any of its publications, please contact the University of Nevada Oral History Program at Mail Stop 0324, University of Nevada, Reno, NV, 89557-0324 or by calling 775/784-6932.

Alicia Barber
Director, UNOHP
July 2012

ORIGINAL PREFACE

Since 1965 the University of Nevada Oral History Program has been collecting an eyewitness account of Nevada's remembered past. Following the precedent established by Allan Nevins at Columbia University in 1948 (and perpetuated since by academic programs such as ours throughout the English-speaking world) these manuscripts are called oral histories. Some confusion surrounds the meaning of the term. To the extent that these "oral" histories can be read, they are not oral, and while they are useful historical sources, they are not themselves history. Still, custom is a powerful force; historical and cultural records that originate in tape-recorded interviews are almost uniformly labeled "oral histories," and our program follows that usage.

Oral histories conducted by UNOHP are meant as firsthand accounts that serve the function of primary source documents, as valuable in the process of historiography as the written records with which historians customarily work. However, while the properly conducted oral history is a reliable source, verifying the accuracy of all of the

statements made in the course of an interview would require more time and money than the UNOHP's operating budget permits.

As with all such efforts, while we can vouch that this work is an authentic expression of Lai King Chew's remembered past, the UNOHP does not claim that the work is free of error. It should be approached with the same caution that the prudent reader exercises when consulting government records, newspaper accounts, diaries, and other sources of historical information.

Each finished manuscript is the product of a collaboration—its structure influenced by the directed questioning of an informed, well-prepared interviewer, and its articulation refined through editing. While the words in this published oral history are essentially those of Lai King Chew, the text is not a *verbatim* transcription of the interview as it occurred. In producing a manuscript, it is the practice of the UNOHP to employ the language of the chronicler, but to edit for clarity and readability. By shifting text when necessary, by polishing syntax, and by deleting

or subsuming the questions of the interviewer, a first-person narrative with chronological and topical order is created.

While there is no standard chronicler profile nor rigid approach to interviewing, each oral history plumbs human memory to gain a better understanding of the past.

Michael Brodhead began interviewing Lai King Chew in January of 1992. Further interviews were conducted by Hwa-di Brodhead in late 1994 through June of 1995 to fill in important details and provide a richer record.

The tape recordings from which this manuscript is derived are in the archives of the University of Nevada Oral History Program where they can be heard by appointment.

UNOHP
April 2000

INTRODUCTION

Between 1849 and 1876 the population of Chinese immigrants to the U.S. swelled to 151,000. Beset by war and famine at home, the Chinese were attracted to the promise of gold in the Western United States. Called “coolies,” the Chinese worked in the mines and helped to build the railroads in Nevada. Sober, thrifty, and industrious, the Chinese eventually found great resentment among the U.S. labor force, laws to keep them off the railroad work crews, and a move to limit their immigration. In the 1860s the Chinese moved into a broad range of occupations. Many became quite prosperous as merchants and restaurateurs, especially in the larger cities of San Francisco, Seattle, and Vancouver, British Columbia.

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Lai King Chew grew up in Seattle, was educated at St. Theresa’s College in Winona, Minnesota, College of William and Mary, and New York University, receiving a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1935. She lived in Vancouver, British Columbia with her first husband, Thomas Chang, and had two children. After divorcing, she settled in Seattle, later marrying Charlie Chew. They moved to Reno in 1956 and opened a casino for blacks and Indians, who at that time were not allowed to gamble in the clubs in Reno. Charlie Chew died suddenly in 1961, and Mrs. Chew quickly learned the gambling business and ran the club herself until 1966.

The Cosmo Club on Commercial Row was a very colorful place. Mrs. Chew’s recollections well describe the wild popularity of keno, a game introduced by the Chinese to the American gambling scene. She recalls the dark and dangerous side of downtown Reno and the characters that frequented this neighborhood.

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where she was the mother hen, constantly making sure that everyone was OK and things were taken care of. Her recollections are fascinating, and the reader will enjoy getting to know this strong, courageous, and wise woman.

Kathleen Coles
Reno, Nevada
April, 2000



CHARLES AND LAI KING CHEW
1959

ANCESTORS, CHILDHOOD, EDUCATION

My parents were from the southern part of China, from the villages in the Guangdong Province along the South China Sea and the Pearl River. My father's village, Hoi San, was about 150 or 200 miles inland. My father was born in 1844, and his name was Hock Gan Eng. [U.S. Immigration officials gave my father an Americanized name, Clyde Eng, because he was the youngest son, and the Chinese word for "the small" sounded like Clyde.] My mother's name was Wong Ling Goon. She was born in 1874. [She actually came into the U.S. with a bought paper under the name of Gook Soo Lee, a Chinese-American baby born in Portland, Oregon.] My father spoke the Fourth Dialect, and my mother the Third Dialect. The Third Dialect is Cantonese and more refined. The Fourth Dialect is more like village Chinese, a little rougher. My mother learned to understand both dialects. Sometimes, by the dialects that people speak, you know where they come from.

My father came to America in the 1860s on a schooner. He arrived in Port Townsend,

Washington and then migrated to Nevada, where he worked on the railroad. I don't know the dates exactly. Then he left Nevada and went back to Port Townsend when my mother arrived there in 1890. They had not met before she arrived in the United States. This was an arranged marriage. My father sent a matchmaker back to China to find him a young wife. The matchmaker went back there and scoured many, many villages to look for a young lady, a young woman, and came upon my mother in her village. With this matchmaker was a picture of my father when he was nineteen years old. When my grandmother saw a handsome young man of nineteen years old (in the picture), she agreed to the marriage. [laughter] My mother was only sixteen when she arrived here, while my father was considerably older—in his forties. Although he had a wife his age in China, he wanted a young wife in the United States, so he could have a family here. And he did. [laughter] He had been in the United States since his teens, for thirty years before my mother arrived.

My mother arrived in Port Townsend with her fourteen-year-old maid servant. Their steamer couldn't dock because the harbor was too shallow, so they were transported by sailors in a dinghy to Port Townsend. When my mother arrived on the dock and saw my father in the buggy with a crop of white hair, she wanted to get back on the dinghy and leave and go back to China. But the dinghy had already *left*, so she had no alternative but to stay.

My parents lived in Port Townsend for a time and then in the early 1900s moved to Victoria, British Columbia, where my father went to work on the Canadian Pacific Railroad. He wasn't very successful, though; he lost a great deal of money to a con artist there. [laughter] So they came back to Port Townsend and opened a Chinese grocery store. There were other relatives from the Eng family, mostly nephews his age or younger, that had emigrated from China and landed in Port Townsend with him, and they originally had the store.

I think a sister was born between 1890 and 1896 who died in infancy, and then my older sister Fanny was born in 1896. She is still alive. After her another sister was born who also died in infancy. I think my mother was too young for childbearing. And then, a brother, William, was born in Port Townsend in 1902, so there were four children born in Port Townsend. William passed away about three years ago, in his eighties.

My parents later left and went to Seattle and established a home, where the remainder of their children were born. All together my mother had nine children: two of the sisters died at infancy, and then there were four boys and three girls. My brother Benjamin was the next child after William. He passed away in 1935 or 1937, somewhere around there. After

Ben was another brother, James, and he is still living. I was born next after James. Then Harry was born. He just passed away last year. Then my sister Della is the youngest. Today there are three sisters and two brothers still alive. I have a sister who is now ninety-six years old.

My sister Fanny married a James, so we had to distinguish between my brother and my brother-in-law. So my brother was called Jimmy. My brother-in-law James was a businessman. He went back to China and had theaters and hotels and restaurants. He had the investments all over. When the Japanese came, and then the communists came, the only thing my sister's family did was escape with their lives and the clothes they had on. That's it.

The reason, I think, my father left Port Townsend is because Seattle was opening up to be a port for immigrants. Ships were arriving there. I remember that my father was tall, had snow white hair, and he was very firm, very traditional, but he was never abusive. He was very kind, and people in the community respected him. He was considered a merchant and an elder in the community. He didn't belong to any tongs. As a consequence, he was called upon as an arbitrator many times during tong wars of that time. [laughter] There were a lot of tong wars. He had a store, a Chinese merchandise store, on King Street in Seattle. He sold Chinese staples and Chinese items to outlying towns and cities where there was a Chinese establishment. And he took care of the immigrants arriving from China. He'd take care of their entry into the United States and send them on their way to wherever their destination was—Chicago, New York, or whatever. It wasn't so much a business—I don't think he received any compensation for it, because he had a very thriving grocery

store. He just wanted to help the immigrants coming through there.

My father had lived in Nevada for a number of years, I understand, and one day when my husband and I were in Las Vegas, we went to a museum that had some Chinese artifacts. We looked around and saw on a wall a list of Chinese names and donations made to a Chinese charity. Among the names there was my father's name and that of one of his relatives. In those days the donation was ten cents—there were quite a few ten-cent donations given to charity. [laughter] But under my father's name was a donation of *twenty* cents. We thought "Hmm, he was wealthier than the others!" [laughter] It was very interesting. (I understand that the whole museum subsequently was bought by somebody else and moved to Florida.)

There was an old, old gentleman, Henry Woo, who was born in 1865 and had come to Nevada as a very young man. He knew my father, because he worked with him on the railroad. We happened to talk one day in Reno at the Cosmo Bar, and we exchanged names and fathers and so on. He said "I knew your father; we worked together. He was older—he was a crew boss on the railroad, and I worked under him." Henry Woo proceeded to give us a lot of background information about my father that I had never known, which was very interesting. I don't know where in Nevada my father worked for the railroad. Old Henry just mentioned the railroad, and so had my mother many years earlier. But we were so young that we never questioned her; it was just a statement.

My father had some property in Hong Kong, and he had family in the village. As I said, he had an elderly wife in China—in those days it was customary to have more than one

wife. [laughter] In China they married very young, you know. The elderly wife in China was more his age, and they had a son and a daughter, both of whom were older than my mother. Both the son and daughter married in China. I understand from relatives in China that the boy was a scholar and was elected to go to Peking to take an examination. If he passed it, he was to return to his district and become a mandarin. A mandarin is a magistrate, a government administrator. He sits like in court in that little township or in the vicinity. That was before the 1900s, don't forget. [laughter] So he journeyed. There was no airplane, no railroad, no auto, and he traveled by foot from Canton to Peking to take the examination. While en route, he became ill and he died; he never reached Peking. It broke my father's heart; he never got over it. This half-brother of mine left a wife and a son and a daughter in the village. My sister Della adopted Jenny, who is the granddaughter of my half-brother. I have met my half-sister, but not my half-brother. He was already dead when I visited China in 1929. My half-sister in China married and had a family of three sons and a daughter. My half-sister lived to be a hundred and three years old.

My father died when we were very young, so we didn't learn too much from him—just from my mother. I never talked to him much about his family. When he died, I think in 1921, he left my mother a young widow with seven surviving children at that time. He died in China in 1921 at the ripe old age of seventy-seven. He had gone back to China to settle a piece of real estate he had in Hong Kong, and then he went back to the village to visit his old home and contracted pneumonia and died in the village, and he was buried in the village. Prior to that he had never been sick a day in his life, but he'd been in America too long,

I guess, and his constitution was probably more acclimatized to the Western world. He just couldn't survive the sanitation and the climate in China.

My father was the youngest of four children, I think, three boys and a girl. I'm not sure. My father brought the sons of his older brother (number two in the family) with him to America. He had three houses in the village of Hoi San in China. He had a home where his first wife lived in China, and later he sent money back from the United States for two more houses to be built alongside: one for his brother, number two brother in the family, and one for number five nephew.

Number two brother stayed in China and had a bakery in the township, and a junk (a Chinese square-sailed, flat-bottomed boat) for business between towns. All these villages around, they have a marketplace, where they go and buy their supplies, or they go there to sell whatever they produce. The bakery was in the marketplace. All the villages surround this marketplace. I have been there, and it's quite a clean marketplace where you buy whatever you need, whatever supplies you need, or sell whatever you have. It's mostly food exchanged for money. The people in the villages usually made their own clothing with fabric imported from the city, like Canton. They have a community well there, no running water. The well is in the village center and is for all the residents of the village.

The last nephew my father brought over was Richard, Dr. Richard. He had a very promising career in medicine. He went through medical school and graduated from Johns Hopkins. He had an American wife whom he married while he was interning in Baltimore. They had a child, Richard Jr. Dr. Richard's mother, who had escaped to Hong Kong when the communists overran China in

the 1940s, wanted him to have a Chinese wife, so he divorced his American wife and went back to China and married a Chinese wife, Amy, and had quite a few daughters and a son. His daughters were named, I think, Dorine, Eileen, Doris, Iris, and Maybelle. This was in Dung Shan. They escaped to Hong Kong when the Japanese war came in the 1930s, and the Japanese had a price on his head. All his daughters were educated at universities in the United States and are living here. He had had a clinic in Hong Kong and did very well as a chest surgeon, specializing in tuberculosis. And then the Japanese overran Canton, and then the communists came, so he remained in Hong Kong after escaping from the Japanese. The Japanese wanted him to return to Canton to practice medicine, and he didn't. He was a brilliant chest surgeon. He came to America many times to attend medical conventions and kept in contact with some of his colleagues. He was very well known in Hong Kong, and I understand that he was asked to go back to Communist China to treat VIPs in the communist regime and was granted safe passage both ways if he would come. I think he did go in and treat the VIPs in Communist China and returned to Hong Kong, but even though they begged him, he wouldn't set up a practice in Communist China. He retired several years ago when his wife had a stroke, and he brought her to America for therapy. About a year ago he passed away on his eighty-ninth birthday, I think, in Tempe, Arizona. Amy is still living.

My father brought number two brother's oldest son with him when he came to the United States. His name was Bing Eng, and he was about my father's age. He died in the early 1900s, I think. Later on, my father brought two more nephews over. Number five nephew married in China and lived in the house that my father had built for him. Over time, more

nephews came over. One, Soo Yuen, settled in Boston for awhile and then moved back to Seattle and had a family there of quite a few children. He lived to maturity and he died in Seattle. From our immediate family, there are not very many of us left, but there are a lot of descendants—nephews, nieces, grandnephews and nieces, and great-grand nephews and nieces.

Now, my mother came from a family of wealth, and she never had to work a farm or anything. She was the youngest sibling. She had two sisters and a brother. Number one was a sister. The oldest sister was the kindest and most soft spoken woman that I have ever met. She took care of us when we were back there as tots. She even took care of my sisters' children, oversaw their care and everything. They each had an *ahma*. When my sister escaped back to Hong Kong, she wanted my aunt to come to Hong Kong with her, but my aunt refused and said she and her daughter would seek refuge up north somewhere at a convent. After the war, my sister asked the Red Cross to trace my aunt, and they discovered that she and her daughter had died of malnutrition and starvation while en route to the convent. My mother was very saddened by it, because she said, "I could have given so much just to save them."

Number two of my mother's siblings was a brother. I never met the brother, but I met the two sisters. The brother died young. My mother said he was a spendthrift and a good-for-nothing, and he lived on the family fortune. In those days, if you had money, if you were a member of the wealthy class, you smoked opium. Only the rich could afford it. He was an opium smoker and a spendthrift. See, my grandpa had died, and they dumped his silk and other merchandise, and my uncle was going through the family fortune real

quick. So, when my mother had this match from America, she thought it was a very good match. She thought my father was very wealthy, living in the *gum san*, you know, the Golden Mountain. And he was a very handsome man at nineteen in the picture, so that is how my mother was married to my father.

I remember that my mother did take me back to Canton province to visit my grandmother when I was about five years old. I remember her very impressive house full of servants, and all the rooms were built around a big courtyard with a fountain. It was very impressive. Of course, after the Japanese and the communists came, there were a lot of changes, a lot of destruction, a lot of confiscation. Even the wealthy lost a great deal. The homes were raided, and the people were killed, but I think my grandmother managed to survive to 102 years old.

None of my mother's siblings ever came to America, but one of her nephews went to Cuba in the 1950s. My mother had communication with him, but I don't know anything about him.

My mother's brother had a daughter that my mother supported after his death. She sent money back to China. They lived through all the war years. They escaped from one village and town to another and hid during the war. They went into the mountains and hid.

This niece that my mother supported had a daughter named Bick Chee, and Bick Chee has a very sad history. Bick Chee's mother was a concubine. My mother didn't want that marriage, but it was done in China, so she didn't have any control over it. Bick Chee's father had another wife. After Bick Chee's mother and father died, the first wife took Bick Chee back to the village and decided she didn't want the child, so she left her out in the rice field to die. Bick Chee subsequently

was picked up by a village couple, and they raised her. When Bick Chee was fifteen years old, the stepmother, who had left the baby to die, comes and decides she could sell Bick Chee to an elderly merchant in another village for some paltry sum of money. So Bick Chee ran away from the village. She ran to the city of Canton. She got a job working for the communist government in Canton at some defense plant or something. She met her husband and married at seventeen or eighteen. From that marriage, she had two sons.

Meanwhile, we had no idea where Bick Chee was or what had happened to her. I don't know if we even knew of her existence. Andrew, a nephew of her father, traced her through the Red Cross and found her. He told Bick Chee, "Do you know that you have close relatives in America?"

She said, "I do?" She was too young, you know. She was only an infant when she was thrown out in the rice paddy, so she had no idea of her mother's ancestors or relatives. Nobody ever told her anything. So she said, "I have relatives in America?"

So Andrew came back and told my sister, "I found Bick Chee." And he proceeded to tell us where he found her and how. We went back to China to look her up. My sister, who was in Canton for twenty odd years, had some pictures of Bick Chee's mother taken when my sister was a secretary at the Ling Nam University. So we took those snapshots out of her photo album. Bick Chee had no idea what her mother looked like, so when we called on Bick Chee, she met us, and we gave her the photograph of her mother and other relatives. She was so grateful that she just cried.

Bick Chee had a son who was about twenty when we discovered them. Her husband is an herbalist. He had escaped to Hong Kong from Canton during the communist regime. We

looked him up, and he's the one that co-wrote the history of Bick Chee, how she was left out in the rice paddy and so forth. He told us her history and how they met, how they worked together in the factory. Bick Chee worked in the factory and got twenty dollars a month. She paid four dollars for her apartment. Well, Bick Chee worked there so long that gradually she became a supervisor and had a grand salary of fifty dollars a month, and her apartment went up to eight dollars a month.

Bick Chee has two sons, one who lives in New York and is married and has children. The other son, Keurng, is still in Canton. They won't let him out. The communists won't issue him a visa.

The communists confiscated all the farmlands, you know. All our farmlands belong to the government. What they raise on the farmland goes to the government, and the government will in turn dole out so much per person, providing that the person worked. If you don't work, you don't get your share. So consequently, a lot of the older people died or committed suicide, because there wasn't enough food for them, too. The younger ones that work in the fields had to share their allotment with the older ones that didn't work. If you were caught giving your food to the older ones, you were punished. Then you lose your allotment. So when Deng Xiaoping came into power, he was more lenient. He decided that the farmers could keep one third of whatever they grow—rice, yams, potatoes. Two thirds goes to the government. With their one third, the farmers could trade with their neighbors. Suppose one neighbor grows rice, and the other grows yams or potatoes—they can exchange their produce.

My oldest sister, Fan or Fannie, who was born in 1896 went back to China, and she married and lived in China for twenty years. Her husband was engaged in business

in Canton. They had extensive holdings in Canton and Kwangsi Province. They had theaters and real estate, hotels and opera houses, and so forth and so on, which was later all confiscated, first by the Japanese, and then the communists. Fannie's husband escaped back to the United States when the Japanese put a price on his head of \$50,000. They wanted him to go back to Canton to run his business and the theater and so forth. And he refused. If he had gone back, he would have been considered a collaborator by the Chinese. Later on, my sister and her three children, two boys and a girl, dressed as peasants and escaped to Hong Kong, and later, back to the United States, just before America entered the war. I think they left on the last boat leaving Hong Kong. I think it was *President Coolidge*, but I'm not sure. They lost everything, all their holdings in China, in Hong Kong, in Kwangsi province, and in Kwangiou province—all their real estate, all their investments.

I was born in Seattle, Washington, July 22, 1909 according to the Chinese date. Chinese people always add on a year or two when you're born. They go from the time that you were in conception. The midwife puts down whatever you say to put down. They don't know.

My father wasn't close to his children. After losing two girls in infancy my parents had three boys in a row: Bill, Ben, and Jimmy. And then when I came along, since he had lost the two girls in infancy, my father said, "Girls aren't good luck. They're bad luck." So he gave me away to somebody—I don't know who. It was a family that didn't have any children. He didn't tell my mother. He just took me away.

My mother was so incensed that she went and got me back and said, "Don't you dare give my children away!" So, I was really the second

daughter out of four daughters he had that had survived to maturity. There were seven children that survived to maturity.

After me, Harry was born, and then Della. And then, he wanted to give Della away, too, so my mother told him, "If you give her away, I'll take all the children away, and I'll leave you." So he didn't dare give Della away. My father, in a way, was afraid of my mother, because she was so much younger and had so much more potential than he did.

Yes, my dad was afraid of my mother, because at that time there weren't very many Chinese women here, you know. If my mother had left my father anywhere, she would have many suitors. And so, my father was afraid that he would lose his young wife. It's funny, too. My mother used to tell me that she heard my father cursing, using a swear word, and she told my father, "You do not use that kind of language in my house and in front of my children. If you do, you won't find us here." So thereafter, he never did swear. He never was rude. He was always kind, although we weren't close. But I think he was afraid that my mother would leave him.

After my father died, there was little money left, and my mother went to work making baskets, and she raised canaries. And the older boys were in their teens, and they were old enough to work in the fish cannery in Alaska, and during the season they earned some money, too, and that helped the family.

My mother went to China to complete the sale of property in Hong Kong that my father had gone over to settle. She turned the money over to the family in the village—the first wife, the daughter-in-law, and the niece and nephew. She told them it would be very difficult for her to send any more money, so she gave them the whole amount. It was around four thousand U.S. dollars, and that

was a lot of money in those days. She said, "Use it wisely. This is to support you in the village."

My mother had met the other wife and, like a loyal and obedient Chinese woman, had accepted the situation. There was nothing she could do about it. She did not consider herself a concubine, but a wife. And the strange thing is, the other wife in China accepted her and regarded my mother's children as her children, too. She had just as much to say about the children as our regular mother. I had occasion to meet her in China when I went back there, and she is very nice and considerate. She said, "This daughter is from America, and she's used to a lot of things that we do not have here." So, all the women in the village, and so forth, listened to her, because she was the elder in the village. And they all had bowed to her request that I be treated separately and treated well. Everybody treated me very well there. I couldn't understand why I had so many special privileges.

When I was a child in Seattle, there were very few other Chinese families. I think you can count on one hand the Chinese families that I know of. There was the Chin family and a couple of Marr families. There was a Woo family, too. I think their descendants are all just scattered everywhere now.

I remember living on Washington Street, and I went to Mainstreet School. After that we moved to Sixteenth and East Jefferson. We bought a house that was formerly occupied by a Dr. Stevens. Then I went to Pacific School, the elementary school. After that I went to Garfield High School. That's where Quincy Jones went to high school—and Jimmy Hendrix, too.

In our home we spoke mostly the Third Dialect, my mother's dialect, because she was home more often. And at school we

spoke English. My mother learned English from watching television and listening to us, and also to the missionaries that visited. She picked up English quite easily. She knows the meaning of English more than she speaks it. On television she liked to watch musicals with Bing Crosby and Georgia Gibbs. My mother had a green thumb. She grew roses and gardenias. She had a lot of house plants and an orchard in the back yard. She grew peaches and plums and apples.

In our home we did not have a Buddhist altar. My father did not practice religion. And my mother was a Christian. Her interest came from the Maryknoll sisters, an order of Catholic nuns, who had an establishment near her village in China. For some reason, my mother learned to read and write, not fluently, but enough, from the Maryknoll sisters. And they taught her a lot of other things. From their influence she became more or less a Christian, and she believes in God. In Seattle she sent us to Sunday school and to church at the Baptist Church. So we had Western influence, and we celebrated the holidays at school and church, like Easter and Christmas.

My mother socialized with about three or four Chinese women. She would visit them. They helped each other in childbirth. The missionaries from the Baptist Church would call at the house to see if the children would attend Sunday school. And we did. I was baptized a Baptist.

The other Chinese families—most of them had lots of children, also. Most of the Chinese men also had wives in China. They were married very young in China and then emigrated to the United States. Some of them never saw their spouse for decades, and some of them even died without seeing their spouse. Mostly they became residents, not citizens of the United States. A lot of the men married what you might call Sing Song girls that

were imported from China to San Francisco as entertaining girls when they were teens. Finally, when they got older they were sold off to men as wives.

My parents did not become U.S. citizens. My father was a merchant, so he traveled here with merchant status. But my mother was actually an American citizen under false pretenses. To bring her to America, my father bought the birth certificate of a young woman who was born in Portland, Oregon, and whose last name was Lee. So my mother came to America as the daughter of this Portland couple who were in China at that time. She was a “citizen” with a bought paper. There was a lot of this done in those days, because of the Exclusion Act. There were a lot of false entries.

After I graduated from Garfield High School in Seattle in 1929 I went back to China intending to go to university there, to Yancheng University up in the north. But what happened is that I got ill with malaria and almost died. I was staying in Canton with my sister, and she told me, “Uh, oh. You can’t stay here. You’ve been sick.” So I came back to Seattle.

Our house on Sixteenth Avenue and East Jefferson was back to back to a house where the Maryknoll sisters lived. I got to be friendly with some of the sisters, especially one sister who was very young, Sister Veronica. We started talking, and I told her what had happened, that I had come back from China, and I wanted to go on to higher education, but that it was expensive. So she said, “I have an idea. I can get you to the College of Saint Theresa on a scholarship. It wouldn’t cost you anything. Would you go there?”

I said, “Sure.” So I went to the College of Saint Theresa in Winona, Minnesota, in 1929-1930, on a scholarship, and I studied liberal arts. That was quite an experience,

because I am not a Catholic. I think there were only two of us that were non-Catholic in that school, but I was accepted there. I did everything they did there, but it was difficult for me to accept their religion, because I had a lot of questions that nobody could answer. [laughter] Consequently, I didn’t stay.

In 1931, I transferred to the College of William and Mary with the help of a Chinese man I knew in San Francisco named Kern Lu. I had met him in Chicago on some summer or Easter vacation. The Chinese colony in San Francisco had a telephone exchange of its own, which was operated by Kern Lu. He asked me about Saint Theresa and I said, “I learned a great deal at Saint Theresa. The sisters treated me very well. I learned how to sit, and I learned how not to cross my legs, and I learned to be a lady there. But religiously there were many doubts—many questions left unanswered.”

So he said, “I can send you to the College of William and Mary.”

I said, “In the East?”

He said, “Yes. I know so-and-so there. You can go to William and Mary. They have a scholarship open. Would you like that?” So that’s how I went to William and Mary for a year.

That was an entirely different experience—I spent a very enjoyable year there. Then I decided they didn’t have the courses I wanted, so I transferred to New York University where I studied interior architecture. I graduated from there with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1935.

In 1936 I got married to one, Thomas Chang, who was a graduate of MIT. He had a master’s in architecture. His bachelor’s degree was from the University of Pennsylvania. We went to Europe on the *Normandy*, and we

spent a summer session at the Beaux Arts in Fontainebleau outside of Paris. Afterwards, we visited Germany.

We went back to New York in 1937. We lived in Central Park West, and we never encountered any racial discrimination at all, all the time we were going to school and living in the East—not until I came to Nevada. And we went everywhere. We went to all the dances at the hotel, like Eddie Duchin at the Plaza, Guy Lombardo at the Hotel Roosevelt, and Xavier Cugat at the Waldorf, and Ozzie Nelson at the New Yorker. We never had any discrimination until we came to Nevada. And I couldn't understand why that was. I couldn't understand discrimination at all.

In New York I met a lot of interesting people. I met people who were in business at Macy's, who were in the furniture business, college people, artists, people from different countries, stage people, and people in the Village—Greenwich Village. A very interesting life, and we didn't seem to have any trouble renting an apartment in Central Park West. I met Anna Helms, the actress, and I met Babe Ruth's daughter. She had an apartment on East Fifth Street. I met Huntington Hartford in Cambridge, Massachusetts, with a group of students from Harvard and MIT. We used to sit together and have a chat. And at that time there were two boys—I can't remember their names—who started a supermarket called the Piggly Wiggly. And later on they changed it to the Safeway store, I think. Huntington Hartford had the A & P grocery store. He didn't seem very interested in the business. All he thought about was spending money.

Cab Calloway had the Cotton Club at the Palace Royal on Broadway. It was a great big place run by a Chinese by the name of James Wong. Alice Fay was singing there, too. My husband had a cousin, Maya Kum Yow,

who was married to this James Wong, the proprietor of the Palace Royal. Maya and her sister, Eileen, were dancers. Later, they had a group called the China Dolls or something. They danced in the Village and at some of the nightclubs in New York. I didn't attend any of them, because I was going to school. There was much studying to do.

A group of us students from NYU used to meet at the Tavern on the Green and have coffee or tea and have our discussion sitting there in the mild spring or early fall. Tavern on the Green nowadays isn't what it was then. It was a good time to be in New York as a student. We went to the opera quite often, because a student was the nephew of the director of the opera. I think his name was Walter Damaras or something like that, at the Metropolitan Opera. We had seats gratis at that time, so we could go often. I got to hear all these opera stars sing—Lily Pons, Gladys Swarthout. We went to a lot of shows in New York, too. We saw *The Tobacco Road* and *Life with Father*, *Clarence Day*, and *Gaslight*.

My daughter Hwa-di was born in New York at Doctors Hospital in New York in May 1937. In 1939 we went back to my husband's hometown, which is Vancouver, British Columbia. My husband was a Canadian citizen. We went to Seattle first. Actually, I was back and forth between Seattle and Vancouver. My son Cherky (Cherk H. Chang) was born in Seattle in February, 1940. In Vancouver we stayed with my husband's family—his father and mother and sister and brother. It wasn't a very happy time, because I had a very domineering mother-in-law, but a very gentle and generous, protective father-in-law, and that's, perhaps, why I stayed so long. My mother-in-law and my husband became abusive. But during the time I was there, I became my father-in-law's secretary and

driver and a lot of things that he depended on. He was a contractor for labor for the New England Fishery in Canada at that time. They did a tremendous business canning salmon. My father-in-law also dabbled in greenhouse tomatoes and other vegetables and strawberries, too.

Besides that, he was the president of the Kwo Ming Tong party in Canada, very well liked and very well known throughout Canada for his part. He was a great figurehead in raising charity for the party and received many accolades from Ti Quan Ti Silk, General Quan Ti Silk, for his efforts in raising funds for the Kwo Ming Tong party.

I saw a picture of Batista of Cuba (Fulgencio Batista y Zaldivar, 1901-1973) in his office, and I asked him about it. He said, "Yes. I think Batista is part Chinese. We correspond."

I say, "You do?" And I remember addressing an envelope to Batista in Cuba. I did a lot of paperwork for him.

He sponsored a so-called nephew in the early days to school in Canada, and this nephew, Tsang Young Foo, became a VIP in the government. His name was spelled Tsang—that's a northern version of Chang. In the government he became a minister of communication and railroad in the Kwo Ming Tong and the Chuki Suk's party. Throughout the war Tsang Young Foo fought with Vinegar Joe Stilwell in the Burma Road, and they became friends. After the war, Tsang Young Foo came to the United States to find some medical treatment for his Parkinson's disease, and my father-in-law came down to San Francisco to see him, and subsequently, I came, too, as an English interpreter. This was around 1945 or 1946. Tsang Young Foo asked me to call the Presidio and ask to see General Stilwell. I called the Presidio and was informed that General Stilwell was in Arizona

resting, recuperating from some illness, but I talked to General Frank Merrill, and as a result, Frank Merrill came to Mark Hopkins Hotel to see Tsang Young Foo. I came down to the lobby of the Mark Hopkins and saw all these soldiers standing at attention, and all the staff was amazed and didn't know what was happening. So I took General Frank Merrill up to see Tsang Young Foo, and they had a conversation among themselves, and then General Merrill said he would inform General Stilwell that Tsang Young Foo was in the United States and had asked for him. Tsang Young Foo said, "If it's possible, I hope that we can meet before I return to China." But I don't think it ever happened, because Stilwell was recuperating in Arizona.

Shortly after that, I had a private nurse engaged for Tsang Young Foo, because I couldn't do the massages he needed. After a time, he spent about a month in Glendale at the sanitarium there for some therapy massages and heat therapy. Then he returned to China. I haven't heard how he fared after that.

While we were in San Francisco, we stayed in the Fairmont Hotel on the top floor, which was the door leading up to the roof, what you might call the penthouse. At that time, it was only seven dollars a day. Think, what it is today! My daughter Hwa-di was quarantined with the mumps while we were there. She still remembers the Blum's Shop downstairs at the Fairmont. She and her brother Cherky would run down there and charge the sundaes.

Shortly afterwards my father-in-law died, and I decided that I couldn't stay in Vancouver any longer, and I couldn't live the life there. I couldn't live and mature with the mother-in-law, so I came back to the United States. I couldn't live with the abusiveness of my husband, so we were divorced around 1948 or 1949.

After my divorce, my children and I lived in Seattle, and I went to work. My sister Della and brother-in-law Chuck Jung opened a laundry on Pike Street which did retailing and wholesaling. I worked there, and my sister and I split a shift cashiering at Ivers Seafood on Broadway street. That went on for several years. Our laundry was called a Supermat. We did small hotel business and also retail business. We had some well-known people come in and out of there, too. We had a wrestler, Gorgeous George, and then we had Robert Geoffrey, the ballet dancer, and Steinerson, another dancer. We had the laundry seven years, from 1948 to 1955.

Meanwhile, in the early 1950s I married Charlie Chew. We had known each other many years before and became reacquainted. He was from a very old San Francisco Chinese family. His father was a labor contractor for farmers in California—asparagus, tomatoes, beans, and so forth. Charlie was born in Los Gatos, and his alma mater was the University of Santa Clara. He was a Mason with the San Jose branch of Masons. And he was a Shriner. My children went to a lot of circuses.

Hwa-di was raised in Seattle and she attended the University of Washington, where she got her bachelor's in sociology. We were very surprised to find out at that time that she was one of the few students at the University of Washington who graduated before she was twenty. There were only fifty students, I think, at the University of Washington who had graduated by the time they were twenty. Hwa-di is married to Michael Brodhead, who was formerly a history professor at the University of Nevada, Reno, and they have two sons, Lynus and John.

My son Cherky graduated from the University of Nevada with a degree in art. He studied under Craig Sheppard. He submitted a painting in a Western states artwork contest

in 1964. Kelsey Harder, who is now teaching at Truckee Meadows Community College, also submitted his artwork. Cherky won first prize with his oil painting, and Kelsey won first prize in his category, so the two boys were very happy. Cherky exhibits his paintings, and he has sold a few. The University of Nevada has one of his paintings on display in their permanent collection.

Cherky can't make a living being an artist, so he had to go to work. He became a stagehand at Harrah's. When they found out that he was an artist, they had him do some painting for the background scenery. Bill Harrah was very impressed with his artistic talent, so Cherky worked up to director of lighting and he's been at Harrah's over twenty-five years. Cherky is married to Silva, and they have a son, Christopher. Silva has an Armenian father and a French mother. Silva's father was a well-known tailor and haberdasher here in Reno, the late Sam Besnilian (Simon "Sam" Besnilian). Silva and her sister Giselle were born in Lebanon. They came to this country to live with their father, who passed away a couple of years ago. Giselle is married to David Wilkinson.

I don't know too much about the illegal gambling in Seattle. During the war they had illegal gambling in the rural districts. The sheriff was paid off so they could operate American games like craps and twenty-one. They would have a restaurant and call it a nightclub. They would have gambling in the back. In Renton, Washington, near Seattle, they had a road house called the China Pheasant, and there was gambling in the back room. That was fifty years ago. My second husband, Charles Chew, had a card room that was located near the Long Acre Racetrack. I knew very little about it. I wasn't interested in gambling.

My husband worked with Hong Lew, who owned the China Pheasant. Hong Lew was the one that paid off all the sheriffs. He knew all the ropes, all the red tape. He knew all the officials that could be bribed.

In Seattle Chinatown there was gambling in private clubs. A lot of them opened up as bars, with gambling in the back room or in the basement. And there was a lot of after hours bootleg liquor, because Washington State had very strict liquor laws. But I don't drink, and my brothers don't drink, so we knew very little about bars and what went on.

I didn't understand one game from another, but in Reno I had to learn, and I learned very quickly about gambling.

THE COSMO CLUB: 1956-1966

How I came to Nevada is quite interesting. My brother-in-law was an ambassador from the Nationalist Chinese Government of Taiwan to Thailand; he was headquartered in Bangkok. Eddie Questa was at that time president of one of the Bank of America branches in Bangkok. My brother-in-law's family and Eddie Questa's family were neighbors. They lived right next door to each other for several years and became good friends. Eddie Questa came to Reno and became president of First National Bank here. My in-laws had a home in San Francisco, and my brother-in-law and sister-in-law knew Eddie quite well, so when we came to Nevada around 1955 on a visit, we met Eddie, and he suggested, "Why don't you move to Reno?" My husband decided it was not a bad idea, so we moved.

Reno was small then. The airport was a shack. You would go into a little shack, and then you would walk out onto the Tarmac, and then you climbed up on those rickety stairs to a plane. There were no jets then. It was propeller, and there was heavy turbulence.

When we took a plane to Seattle we became airsick. The plane was rocking and rolling. It took almost three hours to get there.

Upon arriving in Reno, we discovered there was discrimination here. One time my husband and I went to a nice little restaurant down on South Virginia Street. It could have been Eugene's. We entered and sat down, but we were not served; we were totally ignored. All around us, the people who came in after us had been served. We sat there for well over half an hour until we realized that we were not going to be served, and we finally left.

We realized that some areas outside of the casino row discriminated against Chinese, so we never again ventured any further down Virginia Street to any other restaurant. Of course, we often went to the Steak House at the Nugget in Sparks. The coffee shops in the Cal-Neva, Nevada Club, Harolds Club, and Harrah's served Chinese. (Bill Harrah's Club was then only a storefront on Virginia Street.)

It was strange because while some merchants discriminated, others did not. The bankers, lawyers, Realtors and all the

professional people were very nice to us. It was only on the outside areas where they did—like landlords, small restaurants, barbers I don't know about other Chinese people, but that was our experience. That was forty years ago. I don't find that discrimination now.

As compared to Reno, Seattle was a bigger city and we didn't encounter much discrimination there. But driving down from Seattle to Reno through the small towns was another matter.

My husband was a Californian, an alumnus of the University of Santa Clara. His family had a business in Los Gatos and other areas in California. They didn't encounter much discrimination because they had no need to venture beyond their community, though they occasionally ventured out for charity work and various meetings. My husband was a Mason in San Jose; he didn't encounter much discrimination among the members of the order. He was the first Chinese Mason in that area. He got in there because his father was very well known in California at that time, but his father died very young—in his forties, I think. My husband didn't continue with the Masons in Reno, because he was too busy getting settled.

When we tried to find an apartment, a nice place to live, we couldn't get a place. We were used to owning our own homes elsewhere: in Seattle and San Francisco, we owned our own homes. When we came here we decided we would like to rent a nice place to live, but we ended up living in some run-down place on Elko Street or somewhere. I told my husband, "I can't live here. Let's look around someplace else." We did find a nicer apartment up on Center Street: we rented a two bedroom apartment from an old Greek man; he was very nice. We stayed there for close to two years and all of a sudden, the old man decided that he was going to retire, and he turned the

operation of the apartment complex over to his son and daughter-in-law. The daughter-in-law was very prejudiced and decided that she didn't want Orientals or blacks or anybody living in the complex—only whites. So she raised our rent to about four times what it had been, forcing us to leave.

We looked around at many other apartments. We saw apartments on Forest Street—bright new ones with signs out front: "Apartment for Rent." But when we went to look at one we were told by the manager that it was already rented. We went by there again later and the apartment was still not rented! We visited so many apartments and we were turned down because we were Chinese.

Meanwhile, we had met a lot of nice people in Reno, mostly casino people. One of the people we met was Peter Walters, a Realtor who knew of a lot of new homes being built in Sparks. Through him, we decided to live in Sparks, but only temporarily. Then we figured at a later date, when we got more settled and knew Reno better, we would move back into Reno.

Pete Walters was connected with Probasco, the builders of homes out in Sparks. I think we met Pete through Tom Craven and Jack Douglass. Through Pete, we bought the last house on East Fourth Street and Tasker in July of 1960. It was a nice little house with three bedrooms. Beyond us was nothing but farmland and in the early morning hours, around four o'clock, we could hear the cows mooing. [laughter] At that time there was no Florence Drake School and no other houses. We had very few neighbors because we were so isolated. Some of the other houses around us on Tasker were not sold yet and we were practically the only ones out there, but that suited us fine.

Our refrigerator was bought for us by Virgil Smith, who was at that time at the

Riverside. We didn't know many merchants or business people, so Virgil Smith had the refrigerator shipped out to Sparks for us. I still have the sales slip for that Westinghouse refrigerator. It was three dollars for delivery, and the whole thing was under four hundred dollars. [laughter] Can you imagine that? And that refrigerator is still in use to this day.

Oddie Boulevard was a gravel road, and on both sides were farms. When we drove out to Sparks, it looked like we were going out into the woods somewhere. [laughter] We moved there with the intention of only living there a short time, until we got our bearings. We thought we'd move back in the city and buy a place, but that didn't materialize.

We had a very good social life with Eddie Questa, Tom Craven, and Jack Douglass, and some of the others that were here—especially Eddie Questa. He had lived in the Orient for so long he understood Asian people and the Chinese. Eddie's household on Skyline Boulevard consisted of his housekeeper, gardener and houseboy, all Thais that he had brought with him from Bangkok. Tom Craven and his wife Margaret had a house up there, too. Jack Douglass has a house on Circle Drive. So we were kept quite busy.

Charlie and I both had a good command of the English language. Maybe that's why we got along so well with them. Many times Eddie Questa would drive Tom Craven and us up to have dinner at the Christmas Tree, or the Lancers at that time. There was no discrimination there.

Soon after we moved to Nevada, my husband and his partner, whose name was Phillip Fong, looked around and decided they wanted to try gambling. (Fong owned a Chinese bakery in San Francisco and both he and my father were well known.) At that time in Reno, minorities were not permitted

to gamble in the larger clubs, so they said, "How about a gambling club for minorities?"

My husband told Eddie of his plan, and Eddie said, "Good! I have friends that can help you." So he introduced us to Tom Craven, an attorney, and Charlie Cowan, who was at that time a member of the City Council, and Jack Douglass, who had the Nevada Novelty at that time. Tom Craven became our attorney, and my husband and his partner bought the Owl Club on East Commercial Row, across the street from the railroad station. The address was 142 East Commercial Row. It's no longer there. The whole block has been torn down. It is now Harrah's garage. They then got a license in September 1956, with the help of Tom Craven and Eddie Questa, and opened the Cosmo Club. That's how we got into gambling.

We had no idea what it was like. We did not have Chinese games, but all American games: keno, craps, twenty-one. We did not have roulette. Roulette was not popular.

Among themselves Chinese in Reno played pai-gow and fan-tan, but not in the clubs. In larger cities they played pai-gow and fan-tan in the clubs, but it was usually illegal. You played with money on the table. In order to stay open, the clubs had to pay off the police, the sheriff, whoever is in control. And the reason is that they didn't understand the game, so there was no way they could supervise it. It was illegal until much later when they could supervise a game, and they understood it more. In some of the clubs now they have pai-gow. They played mahjongg at clubs in bigger cities like San Francisco where there was a large market and lots of private clubs. A mahjongg club is like a bridge club. You play with chips. They did not have mahjongg in Reno. The Nevada Club had Chuck-A-Luck (or Birdcage). You play with a wheel and dice in a cage and bet on what dice come up. And the Bank Club had faro, where

you bet with cards. Our old Henry Wu was the faro dealer. He was considered one of the best.

There were six bars on Commercial Row—from Center Street to Lake Street. There was the Corner Bar, the Aggie Bar, the Depot Bar, the Wagon Wheel Bar, the Bucket of Blood, and our bar, all on the same street. The Aggie bar was a gathering place for Indians; the Wagon Wheel up the street was the gathering place for colored. The Depot Bar and the Bucket of Blood were anybody's. [laughter]

During the weekend the whole street was crowded with Indians and black people. The blacks came from California, mostly Oakland. They were not allowed in the clubs uptown, so we ran the Cosmo Bar for the blacks and the Indians, but of course, we didn't keep out the whites—they would come in, too.

For several years it went on like that. The New China Club did a colored business, too, but aside from that, there were no others that catered to blacks. The larger clubs, Harolds and Harrah's, had a white clientele only. There was also the Golden at that time, as well as the Palace Club, but they were all for whites or light-colored people. Chinese were allowed, but not the colored people. I don't know about the Indians, but the Indians weren't gamblers, anyway; they were drinkers.

We established ourselves at the Cosmo Club in October of 1956. We pondered about a name for the club, and they thought of International Club, but I said, "No, that's too trite!" Then they thought of giving it a Chinese name, but I said, "No, let's name it the Cosmo Club. Cosmo—that means sort of embracing all nationalities, doesn't it?" They said OK and accepted it. So I named it! [laughter]

Soon after we opened up the Cosmo Club, we explored the idea of opening similar businesses in Lake Tahoe and Las Vegas. We went to both places, and in Las Vegas

we found that there were already two clubs catering to minorities and blacks. In Tahoe we found that there was a lot of resistance—let's say discrimination. They didn't want any Orientals there and most of all, they didn't want any blacks. We figured there was a lot of graft. I won't go into it, but money talks. In both Tahoe and Las Vegas they would ask you for favors for consideration. They would introduce us to certain people if we would give them consideration. For example, at Lake Tahoe we met a Chinese man who introduced us to some Caucasian fellow—I can't even remember their names—and he told us that if we were interested, he could put us in contact with somebody who had some pull up there for \$1,500. Maybe it was just a con game. I don't know. We didn't pursue that any further. We didn't want to participate in anything like that. Otherwise, you would be forever in their debt. The same thing in Las Vegas—we met somebody. Las Vegas already had a Chinese club there called the El Rio in the black neighborhood, and it catered mostly to black people and ethnic people. That territory was controlled by the Hipsing Tong. Anyway, we met somebody there that said for a certain sum he could get us in touch with Floyd Lamb, or some VIP down there, and he could help us. But we knew it meant a payoff.

So we gave up that idea and concentrated on the Cosmo Club. In Reno we could work in legitimate channels. We didn't have to pay off anybody. We felt it was safer in Reno, because Eddie Questa had a lot to say there. He was our adviser, and he introduced us to Tom Craven, who at that time was an attorney, not a judge, and then we met Jack Douglass.

My husband had several partners. Phillip Fong was one. Subsequently, I think he withdrew from the club as a licensee because of ill health. Another partner was our landlord, Gene Hughes, who came in for

a short time. Gene's father, Frank Hughes, owned the Pioneer Hotel, the Hole in the Wall Bar, and the Corner Bar. But it was very difficult for white people to work with ethnic people in that area, so he withdrew shortly after that. My husband then asked my brother James "Jimmy" Eng to become a licensee and help with the club. So he was a licensee from 1956 to 1961. [In September 1958, father and son, Eugene and Jay Hughes, went into partnership with Charles Chew for 35 percent ownership. In June 1959, they sold their interest to James Eng.]

My husband died very suddenly in the early part of 1961, so then I became a licensee of the Cosmo Club and ran it until 1966. Before my husband's death, I just did book work and the payroll, but when Charlie died it was necessary to get a licensee, so Eddie Questa and Tom Craven arranged for me to get the license right away. I went to the City of Reno and I got my work permit. I think Della Seevers was there at the police department. I submitted my application with Eddie Questa's and Tom Craven's help, and I was granted a license. It was no problem, because I didn't have a criminal background.

At that time Charlie Cowan was the councilman of that ward, where the Palace Club and the Cosmo Club were. So Charlie invited me to lunch at the Palace Club. He said he wanted to meet the Chinese lady that was applying for the city license, because he had heard so much about her. They were all amazed with my command of the English language. I guess they had never met anybody like that in those days—thirty or forty years ago—a Chinese lady that had a command of the English language. They were impressed.

I didn't know a thing about gambling; my knowledge of gambling was nil. But I had a

Chinese master teach me keno, so I wrote keno for a spell at Cosmo Club. I became very proficient at it.

The master keno writer, Leon Foo, was a taskmaster. We called him Boba. Boba means "big uncle." Boba ran games in California before coming to Reno to work for my husband. Charlie knew him in San Francisco. Boba made me write keno tickets until my arm was ready to come apart from my shoulder. I stayed there on the weekend. At that time keno had a limit: the maximum was a ten-cent ticket. Can you imagine that? Ten-cent ticket! I wrote over a thousand keno tickets, almost two thousand at ten cents a keno ticket. Boba said, "Good, you graduated now."

After I began operating the casino, all the sales people were very helpful and they helped me very much in running the casino that way. The liquor salesmen, the Beacon, Sierra Wine and Luce Brothers, taught me a great deal about liquor, which I knew nothing about at that time. I couldn't tell the difference between a Scotch and a Bourbon, and they very painstakingly taught me. They were very helpful. In fact, Bill Luce sent his salesmen over to help me with the bar. Anyway, I was very naive. There were so many things going on.

I had mostly Chinese employees, because they were the ones that understand keno better. They were old keno writers, usually from illegal operations in California, Oakland mostly, and San Francisco. We had probably two or three black people: a black bartender and two black dealers. We had one very colorful Chinese employee whose name was Harry Tong but his nickname was Pork Chop. Among the Chinese employees there were, maybe, only two that spoke English fluently; the other Chinese understood the games but their English was very limited. Pork Chop was one of two employees who spoke English, my brother Jimmie being the other one.

Pork Chop had been some sort of a deputy in Portland, Oregon. When he came down here, he made friends with the members of the Reno police department. [laughter] He was quite a help.

At Cosmo Club we had keno, one large crap table, about fourteen feet long, and we had two twenty-one tables. Our bar was left over from the Owl Club, whose bartender, Sal, was Mexican. We had no roulette, but we did have slot machines, which were put in by Nevada Novelty, owned by Jack Douglass and the Benetti brothers. Other clubs had their own slot machines I think, but we were a small club so we had Jack Douglass put in the machines. Nevada Novelty went in as a partner on the slots on a fifty-fifty basis. In other words, they retained ownership of the machines, and we split the profit. The machines were mostly five-cent, ten-cent, and twenty-five cent. I think there were ten or twelve machines lined against the wall of the Cosmo Club. Also we had a new front put in at the Cosmo Club with glass doors instead of the usual swinging, paneled doors they had at that time.

Keno was our biggest game. It was really big during the weekend when the people started coming in from California. We arranged with Harry Chin out in the Bay area to have three or four buses come in on the weekends from San Francisco and Oakland. I don't know how many keno games we ran a day, but it was a lot. I had fifteen keno writers and five extra writers during the weekend. And sometimes it was so crowded I couldn't even get into my office in the morning. Players were standing out on the sidewalk reading the board through the window, because they couldn't get into the club.

The New China had a keno game, too. I was talking to them and I said, "These ten-cent tickets are driving me crazy!"

They said, "How much do you write a shift?"

I said, "Around five thousand dollars on ten-cent tickets." We were writing ourselves mad. Each writer was writing over a thousand tickets. Ten cents a ticket—can you imagine? You could also buy multiples of ten—you could buy ten, twenty, thirty cents. We had three eight-hour shifts, three keno bosses.

So, they said, "Gee, you're writing more than we are. We couldn't even get five thousand dollars for the whole twenty-four hours."

There were many bars besides us along the street from Center Street to Lake Street, one block on East Commercial Row. Right next to us on Commercial Row was the Corner Bar, and then next there was the Hole in the Wall Restaurant, then Gus's Place, where you could get a meal for thirty-five cents. When one of our customers went broke, I would tell him, "OK, tell Gus to give you dinner." Then on the weekend I would settle with Gus for maybe a couple of dollars worth of dinners. Thirty-five cents a dinner—how much could you eat? Five or six dinners? Then there was a barber shop. Our Club ran from East Commercial Row to Douglas Alley. The front was Commercial Row. The back door was on Douglas Alley facing the back door of the Santa Fe Hotel. People could go in and out the back door. On Lake Street there was also a little Filipino restaurant run by a Filipino woman. In back of the Santa Fe Hotel was the Greyhound Bus Station.

One day I discovered that there were tunnels under the club and under Douglas Alley. We had a plumbing stoppage, and I called a young plumber. He said, "I have no idea where the trap or anything else is, but I know who does."

It was just an old building. He gave me the name of an old plumber, and I called him.

He had a place on Broadway. He came down and said, "Oh, I know these places well. The plumbing is here, there. I've been down here all along these stores lots of times." He knew exactly where the connections in the traps were.

So I went downstairs to the basement with him. It was the first time I had been down in the basement. I couldn't believe it—there were tunnels down there! I said, "My heavens, where does it go?" Evidently it ran through other stores' basements.

I happened to mention this to old Henry Wu. Henry said they were dug to a height of six or seven feet and wide enough for a person to walk through very comfortably. Henry said, "I remember this place. Those tunnels used to be for escapees. When the place was raided for drugs or gambling, people would escape through the tunnel."

I said, "Where does it lead?"

He said, "It goes straight over to so-and-so's place." I don't remember what store it was. I never followed the tunnel all the way, because it was just too spooky. It went all the way under our club, and I presume it went all the way under Douglas Alley, too. The tunnels were dug in the early 1900s, 1920s, I presume. That whole block is Harrah's garage now. All those bars are gone—the hotel, everything.

Around the corner and across Lake Street was the New China Club, run by Bill Fong. They were in Reno before us—in 1952, I think. Bill Fong was the first one there. He had the New China Club with a bar and a restaurant. It was quite a large place. He catered to blacks, the Indians, the Hispanics—the ethnic groups. Then we came, and he more or less resented our being there, but there wasn't anything he could do, because we obtained our license legally through Tom Craven, as our attorney, and Eddie Questa, as our

advisor. We didn't bribe anybody. We went through legal channels.

Next to him was a hotel—a flophouse, really. I don't remember the name. [Toscano Hotel] It was a men's hotel. Next to that men's hotel was the Mint Club. There was a group of Chinese under a California Chinese man named Joe Yip, who opened the Mint Club. His background in California was very colorful. He was engaged in several illegal operations. I understand there was a murder involved, but he was never convicted of it. It was never proven. He evidently found another partner who was Italian, Al Figoni, who got the license. Joe Yip was not allowed to work there. He became a silent partner. It is a rumor—I don't know if it's true—that he paid \$25,000 to one of the Gaming Control Board members for favorable approval. For some reason or other, they lost money there. I think they just stole the money. It didn't last very long. They closed up and left town.

The Harlem Club on Douglas Alley was a small bar with a black owner. It had a twenty-one table. It was behind the New China Club, near the railroad tracks. It's gone now, but it was a gathering place of some of these more reputable black people.

On the north side of the tracks there weren't any casinos. That area used to be the Northside School, on Fourth Street between Lake and Center Street. Then it became a parking lot for Harolds Club, and now it is the National Bowling Stadium.

In that same area of Lake Street and Commercial Row was Kiah Lumpkin's little restaurant called Kiah's Squeeze Inn. It was like a hole in the wall. It just had a few stools, and its specialty was its famous spareribs. (Kiah's Squeeze Inn opened on Lake Street and Commercial Row in 1962 and moved to Virginia Street in 1967, across from the Eldorado Hotel and Casino, where it operated

until 1983, when Kiah Lumpkin opened Kiah's Cafe at the Golden Reef Hotel on Fourth Street. He died in 1992.) Then on Center Street there was the Golden Hotel and the Bank Club. But the Golden Hotel burned down in 1962.

When we came here, Harrah's Club was just one storefront on Virginia Street. And there was another club, the Frontier Club. It was later absorbed by Harrah's Club. It was next to the First National Bank on the corner of Second Street and Virginia Street. Then, Harrah expanded over to the alley and took in the Bank club and the Golden Hotel. They took over the corner of Center and Second. The Horseshoe Club came later. It was across the street. And there was the Colony Club that Harrah's took over on the corner of Virginia and Douglas Alley. Douglas Alley went all the way through from Virginia to Center to Lake Street. There was the Archway Drugstore and Tom Wong's Banker's Cafe. On the corner was the Sierra Turf Club. We used to go there and buy the most delicious pastrami sandwich on rye.

Also in Douglas Alley was Harolds Club's Kiddie Movie Theater. Later on Harolds Club bought all that property there, the Bank Club, the Archway Drugstore, the Sierra Turf Club, with the intention of building a hotel, but I guess Pappy died, and it never materialized.

Gray Reid Department Store was where Circus Circus is now on Virginia Street and Sixth Street. Gray Reid had a restaurant in it, a little cafe. There was a tire shop across the street, Risson's. They had several locations, but they were sold or went out of business. They had a Shell station and Mission Tires. Where the Silver Legacy is now was the Sewell Market, which later became the Mayfair Market. Up Commercial Row, west of Virginia Street to Sierra Street, at that time there was the Rauhut Bakery, the Mikado Laundry, and

a fish market, too. On Virginia near Fourth or Fifth, they had a Welsh's Bakery. That's where the Eldorado is now. We used to smell the bread being baked there. Later, that was the site of the Little Wall, Little Waldorf. Further down Virginia Street there was the Waldorf Restaurant, Joseph Magnin's, and Armanko Bookstore. Further down was an archway or arcade; you would take an elevator up, and there was an attorney's office, and my dentist was up there, too, Dr. Harold McNeil. Dr. Clark, the eye doctor was up there. That's all gone now. Joseph Magnin's moved down to Parklane Mall, and the Armanko closed up. Waldorf moved.

There was Frank Moore's Shoe Store on Second Street, where Cal-Neva is now. There was another shoe store and Morris's Jewelers. There was a shoe store on First Street—Lloyd Gauchi's. There was a beauty school downtown on Second Street, where the Imperial Palace Chinese Restaurant is now.

We used to go to the Grand Cafe on Second Street for lunch, and we used to have lunch at the Coach Room in the Mapes. We had dinner at the Riverside. Sarah Vaughan performed there. Paul Anka performed there when he was a teenager—eighteen or nineteen. I remember hearing him. He was a little kid! He wasn't allowed to gamble or anything. At that time, Virgil Smith and Jack Douglass bought into the Riverside.

Nobody was excluded from the Cosmo Club—no particular race—but our clientele was mostly the colored people and the Indians. Occasionally, we had Asians and a very small percentage of Caucasians, I would say.

Blacks were great players of keno and dice, especially keno. I think their interest in keno stemmed from the fact that in California—Oakland and San Francisco, mostly—the

Chinese used to operate keno behind closed doors. [laughter] It wasn't legal, but they did have keno behind closed doors. So the Blacks knew keno. The blacks liked craps, too. We had so many keno players in our club that they would stand outside on the sidewalk to read the keno board. During the weekend, I would say, we had 98 percent colored people. We had very few Chinese; they played uptown, mostly.

Keno has an interesting history. It got started among the coolies and miners that came over from China to the United States. I've never heard of it being played in China, but it was played wherever there was a Chinese community on the West Coast: Seattle, Portland, Oakland, San Francisco, and Vancouver, British Columbia, too. But it was illegal in every sense of the word. The keno runners were like numbers runners. They'd go from a grocery store here to a laundry there. They'd collect the money from the players and take it back to their little headquarters. There would be one game in the morning and one in the evening. It took a little while for the runners to collect all of the tickets, you know.

The eighty numbers on the keno ticket were in Chinese characters representing a proverb. I remember the characters consisted of heaven, the sun, the moon, the water, the fire, the earth. I'm not versed enough to know what that proverb was, but people bought the tickets and picked out the characters for some event. They would select characters to represent some occurrence in their lives. The tickets were usually ten cents back then, and they had a table of winnings. Usually, they played ten numbers, and the limit on winnings was maybe \$2,000 or \$5,000.

The characters were written on papers, all folded up in round tubes, and they would shake it up and divide it into four twenties and pick one group of twenty numbers. I don't know exactly how they figured out

the payoff. They marked the tickets with a Chinese calligraphy brush. Just like you would have a pen and pencil in your house today, at that time every Chinese family had a brush and ink pad.

When keno came to Nevada, the characters became eighty numbers. The players would mark their tickets with blue ink—it looked like laundry blueing. You would take your ticket to the counter, and then the keno writer marked your ticket with black ink. Then, he would number the ticket. He would take your blue ticket, which was called the inside ticket, and give you the ticket *he* marks with black ink. That's your ticket—the outside ticket. When you would win, you would bring your black ticket to the counter, and they would match it with your original blue ticket. That's how they would decide whether you won or lost.

The Chinese people used to believe in good luck in gambling. In our club we had a small altar to bring good luck. The pit bosses used to come in and light some incense. We also had a tiger and a statuette of one of the fighters, Kwan-gung, who was one of the early warlords. I didn't believe in this, but the pit bosses did, so I let them do whatever they wanted. It didn't hurt anything. They had their little quirks. [laughter]

There were some very nice black people who used to come into the club. One of the couples was Jimmie and Homer. They were in the news some time ago about raising a little white girl. Jimmie was a lady who worked at the Riverside Hotel. She was approached by some woman from San Francisco who gave her a little white child, whom Jimmie ended up raising. Homer worked for the city of Reno with a road crew. She and Homer would come into the club quite often after work.

Their favorite drink was Coors beer and they played keno.

I also remember there was a young black sailor that came into the Cosmo Club in the late 1950s or early 1960s. He told me that he was a cook, and he said he liked to read. He didn't gamble very much, but he wanted to see what it was like, so he'd come in with some others. He said, "I read a great deal and I write a lot of letters for different shipmates. I don't do much, but I do like to read." I often wondered if that wasn't Alex Haley.

The white men who came in were mostly locals. They were slumming. They were looking for prostitutes. They were well-known local people. Some are still around. I won't mention their names. They would stay at the Mapes or the Golden, and they would give me their hotel keys. And then, Smitty or the bartender would tell them, "Hey, mister, this lady owns this club. She's not one of those." [laughter]

And Bob Starr used to say, "Hey, mister, she's not one of those. She owns this club."

North of the club was the Santa Fe Cafe and Hotel, which catered to the Basque people and the sheep-herders. When we first had Cosmo Club we used to get a few sheepherders when they came down from sheep herding around November and December. They would spend the winter in town around the Santa Fe Hotel; the Santa Fe had lockers in its basement for them to put their gear. It was very interesting. But gradually, after the blacks and the Indians started coming in, the sheepherders didn't come in anymore.

Ordinarily, we had three employee shifts: the day, the swing, and the graveyard shifts. We had around thirty employees; on weekends we had as many as forty. We had weekend help in keno—at one time we had

as many as fifteen keno writers because it was the main game of the people coming in from California. They mostly came from Oakland and San Francisco and outlying small towns. After a time we established a relationship with a Chinese tour company in San Francisco and they began sending us customers on the weekends by the busload.

During the times when people came by the busload, I would get up at four o'clock in the morning and I would be down at the club about five o'clock and I couldn't even get into the Cosmo Club. The keno tickets were thrown away knee deep—I had to wade through all that to get into the office. There were so many people standing outside of the club to watch the keno board. At that time we had ten-cent keno with a five thousand dollar maximum. (Uptown it was ten thousand.) We had a ten-cent crap table, too. We had to have two dealers and a box man on the table because there was too much play on it. [A boxman sits on a low chair directly behind the drop box at a dice table to observe all action on the craps table and verify all payoffs and money transactions.] We had a fourteen-foot crap table, and I tell you, if you weren't faster than the players, they'd up their bets and *run* if they lost it! [laughter] So you just had to bring it in as fast as the seven came out. I tried to be a box man sometimes, but it got too much—I don't know how many times I fell into the crap table, so finally I gave it up and had somebody else do it. It was just too much! [laughter]

We had no trouble at all with our patrons at the club. We treated them like human beings, so we got along very well. Like everybody else, they had their likes and dislikes, their problems, but they weren't magnified and we got along very well. I can't say that we trusted all of them, [laughter] but they seemed to

trust us. They were very cordial, very nice. They didn't misbehave, generally speaking, and they did not take advantage of us. We helped them out personally from time to time. They'd come to us with all kinds of problems: marital problems, family problems And, of course, we contributed to their charities, too. And when any individual was down and out, we bought them their meals, we gave them fare to go home—that was all good will.

My customers looked out after me; they were my bodyguards. They wouldn't let anything happen to Mrs. Chew! [laughter] A strange thing: my car would be parked downtown and all the cars around there would be ripped off except mine. [laughter] That's because they would always say, "Leave that alone; that belongs to Mrs. Chew!" That was quite a family of protectors I had down there. They would always see that I walked to my car safely. Occasionally, there would be a few drunks, but they would always be put in their place. I had two self-appointed bodyguards who tried to keep order for me. Freddie Hines was from Oakland. And Smitty was local. He was one great, big, black man, a construction worker who moved heavy equipment. He was very, very strong. Smitty was a very kind old soul, a gentle giant—when he was sober, that is—but when he was drunk, Lord help us! When he was drunk I'd usually have my bartender cart him upstairs to rent one of the rooms at the Pioneer Hotel above us and let him sleep it off.

Smitty would sit outside near the train station and watch what went on. He always saw that I got to my car safely, and when I'd leave my car, he would escort me around the area. That area was not safe for any strangers to be in—Commercial Row and Lake Street. You can get mugged on the street, if you're a stranger there. He and Freddy Hines and ever so many others were very, very kind to

me and very protective. I had no fear because, generally, it went around in the neighborhood who I was and what I did. And I settled their fights, too—they minded me like children! It was quite interesting, like a great big family.

One time we went on a shopping spree in San Francisco, and when we came back the car trunk was so full it wouldn't open. But I had someone who was skilled at picking locks and so forth, an ex-convict, and he didn't have any trouble opening it. [laughter]

Another time our dog, Godfree, was stolen. The gate was left open, and we missed the dog for several days, and I kind of had a hunch it was stolen by the garbage collectors, so I let it be known among the Cosmo clientele that I wanted my dog back. "Whoever has it, let the dog go. No questions asked. I want my dog back."

And next thing I know, the dog is running around in the neighborhood. And then some Caucasian man picked up the dog, but the radio people heard about it and said, "That's a dog that has been advertised as missing!"

So, I think Cherky went down to the radio station with Kelsey to claim the dog. The other man claimed the dog was his, but the minute they got in there, Godfree jumped on Cherky and Kelsey. The radio people said, "Well, we know who owns this dog." So they got Godfree back.

But Commercial Row and Lake Street was the most vicious corner. There was the Corner Bar there, doing a lot of illegal business. One time the owner had somehow or other encouraged a whole group of University of Nevada students down to the bar, and every weekend they would come down here, and these poor kids would get mugged, beaten up, and the kids got drugs to sell at the university. They would come down in groups, and they were badly, badly hurt. They used to come

into the Cosmo Club to gamble, and I had to check their I.D., and most of them were underage—nineteen and twenty. I'd throw them out. Then they were at the Corner Bar getting drunk, using drugs, or recruited to sell drugs. It happened for quite a few months until, all of a sudden, I think the police department complained to the university. I happened to mention it to Judge Craven, "I sure don't like to see all the university kids getting hurt down here."

And they were not black kids; they were white kids that came down there. I know they were getting beat up, rolled, and robbed. They were drunk. I think the police were called many times. Finally, the university put that area off limits to students. If they were caught down there, they would face expulsion from the university. So that cleaned up their rendezvous.

When we first set up business there, a policeman named Eddie came around and asked for forty dollars a week. [laughter] So we took the forty dollars up to the police chief, Ted Berrum. He, of course, said that there was no such thing, that it was not demanded by the police department. [laughter] Next thing I knew, Eddie didn't patrol that area any longer. But we seldom called the police, because we hardly ever had any trouble down there. The people, generally, behaved very well in the casino. We had no one at the club who was specifically there for security purposes, either; we didn't need it. We, ourselves, policed it very well. We mostly always stopped arguments and fights before they ever began. If I heard any loud voices, then I was there! We always had coffee there for the people who wanted it, and usually the customers minded me.

Occasionally, there were disturbances in the club, but not often. Sometimes troublemakers would run from outside

into the club, waving guns or knives. It was impossible to stop them, but then Smitty and some of the other blacks would stop them and push them outside the door.

Outside on Commercial Row, it was a different story, though. It was like a battlefield: they had fights; they had killings and drunks. You name it—they had it! Every morning about six o'clock the paddy wagon rolled down the street and picked up all the drunks and threw them in like logs. During the wintertime when it was so cold, you'd find drunks on top of the hood of your car or underneath the car where it was warm.

Every Monday morning or even on Sunday, if I went out into the alley in back of our Cosmo Club, I'd see all these empty wallets lying around. [laughter] They were from the pickpockets! There were tons of empty wallets all over the alley.

On the streets there was good deal of illegal activity in and around the neighborhood. There were drugs being sold. I have no idea of what kind, but I know drugs were being sold, and once it happened in our club. Several very well-dressed women started coming down to the club. They'd sit at the bar and order a drink. I thought it was strange when they started coming down quite frequently for a spell. Then I noticed that somebody in the neighborhood would make certain exchanges, and then they'd leave. [laughter] Naive as I was, I had no idea what was going on. Later, I realized they were selling drugs in my place! So I contacted James—he was the one that was selling the drugs—and said, "Look here, I don't want any more of this in the club here. You either stop it, or else I will turn you over to Manning." (Robert Manning at that time was in the narcotics division; he was in plainclothes.) "OK, Mrs. OK. I won't do it!" Thereafter we didn't have any more ladies that came down to the bar.

Very often on weekends there would be several station wagons of very young women coming in from the Bay Area. I presume they were prostitutes. Some of them became very familiar at the club, and as long as they drank and gambled somewhat, and as long as they didn't solicit in the club, I allowed them to stay. They solicited anywhere on the streets, in the clubs, bars, hotels—anywhere around that area on Lake Street. But I wouldn't allow it in the club, and they all knew it. [laughter] But quite often there were Caucasian people slumming in that area and they would get drunk and get rolled. I know those things happened. [laughter] I won't mention names, but some of them were business people in town.

One time there was an out-of-towner from the East who was drunk and had lost his wallet. His wallet contained quite a bit of money, but he was most anxious to get his identification back—he did *not* want any publicity. So one of the cops came down and asked me about it. I said, "Oh, he wants his wallet back. He said he doesn't care about the money, but he wants his wallet back." The man was offering a two hundred dollar reward with no questions asked, so the cops put out the word, and I, too, let it be known. That same night the wallet was returned and no questions asked. [laughter]

There was trafficking in stolen goods in the neighborhood; you could buy almost anything: a TV, clothes, appliances, cigarettes, meat, lobster No delivery truck was ever safe in that area. If you left your door unlocked, the contents were gone! [laughter] One truck carrying a load of nylons even had its contents stolen, and some women came by the club selling nylons at twenty cents a pair. One of the police came in and asked me, "Will you buy a pair of nylons for me, so we can see if they are the same kind that were stolen?"

I said, "You want me to buy stolen goods?" So I bought a couple of pairs and they were the same ones, but by then they had gone through so many hands, how could they know who the culprit was?

Then a motel that was being built up on North Virginia Street had some TVs stolen before they were installed. Next thing I knew, TVs were on sale on Commercial Row for forty dollars. The strangest part of it was, these big trucks came in from California with all kinds of new appliances, and you could buy coffee pots, irons, toasters, all sorts of small appliances. Everything was new, still in its original wrappings. Every day, something came up. It was almost like a bazaar down there. [laughter] Yes, those were the days, I'm telling you!

There were murders, too. Once we had a woman who had a stiletto knife with a very long, thin blade. She ran it into another person just outside the club, and he was dead on the sidewalk. We had one murder that I was kind of involved in because I knew the victim and I knew the perpetrator. The victim was a great big black named Tucker; he was big, about six-four or six-five. He was not a very nice person when he was drunk. He carried a gun, and he'd shown it to me many times. (I always told him to put it away.) He never did anything in my club, but one time he and a man named Cook got into a fight at the Harlem Club on Lake Street and Tucker took a knife and stabbed Cook umpteen times. Finally Cook got hold of Tucker's gun and shot him and killed him. Cook came running into our club and fell down on the floor, bleeding all over. We called the police, and they got the ambulance and took him away. They arrested him for murder, of course, and I ended up testifying in court. Cook's public defenders were Jerry Whitehead and Al Osborn. The two of them came down and questioned us about

the murder, and we told them what we knew. I ended up in court to identify the gun with the white handle that was used to kill Tucker. Later Cook went to prison for manslaughter, I guess. He sent word to me from prison to thank me for helping him when he was bleeding and injured. [laughter] A lot of my former customers who were in the state prison in Carson City would often tell their fellow inmates who were being released, "When you get out, be sure and say hello to Mrs. Chew." That was my clientele down there. [laughter] It was rough, I'm telling you.

Another time there was a woman who went amok and she was waving a great big knife and a pistol around. I think she was drunk and angry about something. I tried to stop her and she wouldn't be stopped and came after me. I ran out in the street and saw a paddy wagon up at the corner near the Wagon Wheel, so I ran up and two cops were standing there. I told them to come down and give me a hand to subdue this woman, but the policemen said they were busy. And they were standing around doing nothing! I told them someone was sure to get killed, and they said, "Well, we'll come down later." There were one or two other incidents when we called the police, and it took them about three quarters of an hour to get there, but when I really needed them, I ran up the street to call them. So, this time I went back into my office at the club. Meanwhile, Smitty and some local people had subdued this woman, slapped her down, and took the knife away from her, and her husband came and took her away. I was so upset and annoyed with the two policemen that I picked up the telephone and called Chief Briscoe. I was angry! I told him who I was, and he said, "I know who you are."

I told him I wanted to come up and see him right then! I ran over to the police station and laid my complaints on Chief Briscoe's

desk and asked him, "Do you know that your policemen were too busy when I asked them to come down and give me a hand? Too busy! People could have been killed, and they were too busy!" I asked him, "What's the matter? Am I a stepchild of the police department?" I was so mad that I just told Chief Briscoe what I thought of his department.

The next day, Manning and Marvin and some of the other policemen came down from the plainclothes division and asked, "Mrs. Chew, what did you do?"

I said, "What did I do?"

They said, "The chief got us all together and chewed us out."

I said, "Good!"

I think they often didn't come when I called, because I had no restaurant to cater to them. Bill Fong catered to them with free food and drink. They had their dinner and lunch there, and had their drink after work at the bar. We didn't cater to any of that. And we never paid that policeman, Eddie, when he came around asking for forty dollars a week. So, I guess we weren't in good standing with some of the police—not all of them—but some of the police, because we had nothing to offer them. But after the chief chewed them out, they were very attentive.

We had cheaters at the club but usually we spotted them before they could do too much damage. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, we had The Professor, who was a very well-known card counter. He had been barred from all the clubs in Reno. He came into the Cosmo Club, in disguise: he had horned-rimmed glasses, wore a suit and a porkpie hat; he was very well dressed. He came to play twenty-one, but we spotted him. We let him play for a while, and he didn't win or lose, and I guess he was probably aware that we had spotted him. He stayed in the area about two days, and the

next day, when he came around again to play, we just told him that we weren't going to deal to him, that he couldn't play here anymore. We called up Harolds Club and told them that The Professor was in town, so the whole town was alerted. [laughter] He was barred from all the clubs uptown, so he thought he would try downtown. He would appear in various disguises: sometimes he would be dressed like a lumberjack with boots and a jacket, or he'd come in as a cowboy, but one look at his hands and you knew that he was not a truck driver or a construction worker or a rancher.

The Professor had a fantastic memory; he remembered the cards dealt. Our dealers never dealt to the last card—maybe a third of a deck or a half of a deck, and then they would shuffle. But if you dealt to the last card in the deck, he would win the money. I think he played in Vegas, too. (Of course, there wasn't Atlantic City at that time.) He became very well-known in the state. [laughter]

We had other cheaters, too. We had cheaters that marked—daubed—the cards. Then we had people that crimped the cards. We had a couple—I think they were Hispanic—who came in to play twenty-one. I was watching them, and I said, "Something doesn't look right." So we changed the deck, and I took the deck into the office and checked the cards and noted that a lot of cards were missing. [laughter] I think they realized that they'd been spotted, so they left and went next door to Kiah's to have dinner. At my request, a policeman followed them into Kiah's. I said, "Shake them down!" He did, and all the picture cards fell out. [laughter] So they were arrested for cheating.

Most of the time we simply asked people to leave, because, unless you had them on camera, you couldn't accuse them of cheating, and we didn't have cameras. We would just close the table and say, "That's it," and they'd

leave. Then, usually, they'd move uptown to the bigger clubs to see if they could get away with it there, but we usually did each other the favor of notifying one another.

We had one black man named Tex in our club who doctored a keno ticket. [laughter] He thought he could get away with it, but we didn't have an inside ticket for him in the first place. At that time, the keno writers wrote outside tickets in black ink. There was quite a bit of confusion and commotion at that time. Somehow or other this man managed to reach over, and he stole a brush full of black ink from one of the keno writers and doctored a ticket on top of the blue inside ticket, and he had claimed that he won at keno. [laughter] The keno writer said, "I didn't write that ticket. That's not my writing." All the keno writers had their own characteristics when they made their brush strokes—just like penmanship. So he got an attorney and came down and demanded payment. They brought a member of the gaming board in. The ticket was so doctored and so amateurish that anybody could see it was doctored. I said, "This ticket is doctored. We have no inside ticket with that marking on it. No inside ticket." I held the ticket up and I said to his attorney, Stan Brown, "Do you think this is a legitimate ticket? Take a look at it."

He held it up and said, "No." He said to Tex, "You can't collect on that ticket." Tex made quite a commotion. Later, Tex went to the Cal-Neva and pulled the same trick. He caused a commotion over there, and then Warren Nelson got hold of me, and I told him Tex had tried the same thing at our club. People like Tex thought they could get away with cheating, but they didn't know there was so much checking in the system.

We called our attorney down—Clark Guild. He said, "What happened?"

I told him, “Cal Neva just called me up, and they had the same thing happen over there.”

So, Warren Nelson told this Tex guy, “You try that over there? Now you come over here and try it? You think we’re fools?”

Stan Brown refused to take the case. Tex never got paid. And Warren Nelson told Tex, “If you try this stunt again and try to harm this little lady and come over to my club and try this again, I’ll find the biggest butcher knife, the longest one, and run it through you.” And that was the end of him.

At the Cosmo Club, we sometimes cashed checks for people. Sometimes the welfare recipients from California would bring their welfare checks in for me to cash, but I advised them not to bring them into the clubs to cash, because the welfare of their families is not for gambling. Thereafter, no one brought welfare checks in.

One time someone tried to cash a stolen paycheck from Emeryville, California. The man looked legitimate, so I asked him for his I.D., and he presented a wallet with some I.D., which had the same name as on the check. So I asked him to endorse the check, but he signed his *own* name on the check. I turned around and said, “You stole this check, didn’t you?” And he grabbed it and ran out the door.

We had another woman come in and cash a couple of payroll checks from some eatery in California. It was a quite well-known place, and I cashed her checks, but they were returned to me by the bank as stolen checks. Very shortly after that she evidently stole the payroll checks from this company and cashed them at various places. One day, then, the D.A. from Oakland asked me to appear there in court to identify this woman as a forger of the checks. They flew me to Oakland, and I testified that she was the one for whom I

had cashed the checks, and then they flew me back.

There was another case where a man came in, and he was a good forger, too. On the American Express travelers checks you have a name on top, and then you have to sign your name again to cash the check. I looked at the signature; it was pretty good—almost identical. This man was a good forger. Abe Farrell of the Reno Police Department called me up and asked me about the stolen checks. I said, “Yes, I did cash one. There was a great big black fellow that came in with a book of them.” So there was always something going on; always something. Those were just some of the problems we had—it’s all part of gaming.

One time I was called to the police station, because they had arrested a Chinese woman who happened to be the wife of one of my dealers. His name was Leon Fong. His wife had been arrested because she was chasing after a bunch of neighborhood kids with a cleaver. In the police holding cell she was violent and screaming and fighting off the police. They couldn’t make her settle down, so they couldn’t keep her there, because she was batting around—they were afraid she was hurt. I couldn’t get her to calm down to tell me what was wrong or anything. She was screaming and crying. So finally, we got an order from Judge Bowen to have her committed to the Lake Crossing Mental Institution. I called her husband, and then she didn’t behave in the hospital, either. She was isolated, and they sedated her. I think she was in there for about ten days, before they released her.

Finally, I got her calmed down and explained the situation to her. She told me the reason that she went after the kids was because they threw stones and mud at her and taunted her because she was Chinese and

didn't speak English. These were white kids. She said she finally couldn't stand it, and that's why she ran after the kids with a cleaver. I also found out that she was slightly unhappy here in Reno, because she was so isolated from her friends and family and from other Chinese. She was alone in the apartment with nothing to do. I understand that she took the cleaver and chopped up the kitchen in the apartment. After I got her released, I think her husband took off for San Francisco.

Every time there was something wrong the police called me. And Judge Craven always called me up there. If there was an accident case, or a divorce, or an attorney for Chinese people, I was called up there to interpret.

One time a man who worked for me, Quong Tong, was diagnosed as having lung cancer, and so he agreed to an operation, so I was called to check him into Washoe Medical Center to have his surgery. He had half of his lung removed. He had a family here, a wife and three boys and two girls. His wife went up to the hospital and demanded that her husband, who was in the recovery room, go home with her. [laughter] The floor nurse called me up, so there I go again. I went up to the hospital, and she was raving mad and demanding this and that. Of course, the hospital staff didn't know what she was talking about, but they knew that she wanted to see her husband. I had to calm her down and take her home. Her husband was in the *recovery* room, but she wanted to go do something, and she wanted him to *babysit*.

Another man who worked for me, Dewey, had trouble with his family. His wife didn't understand English nor accept the American way of life. She had so many demands—this and that. She used to bring her children down to the club, and I had to stop her from doing that. I said, "This is a club, it's not a playground for the children."

She said, "Well, I want my husband to watch them."

I said, "He can't watch the children here, because no children are allowed in the club!" So, I had a terrible time with her. She just didn't understand the way of life. I got tired trying to explain it to her, trying to get her husband to rein in his family. It wasn't easy.

Subsequently, Dewey's wife had some swelling in her glands on the neck. I made an appointment for her to go see a doctor, and she refused to go. Her husband couldn't persuade her to see a doctor, and I couldn't persuade her. She died because of those lumps in her neck—cancer of the lymph nodes. It might have saved her to go to a doctor, but she was very stubborn, and you couldn't get her to do that.

Another time one of my employees named Wong landed in a nursing home, because he had diabetes, and it affected his leg. He had a sore on his leg that wouldn't heal. I went up to the nursing home to see him. He complained that they weren't feeding him. He said, "I have nothing, no breakfast to eat. Dinner time they gave me two chicken wings to eat, and that's all. Will you bring me some food?"

So, I say, "Why?" I went and complained to someone—I don't remember who—and they did check up on that nursing home and said that they weren't treating the patients well.

All these problems I had! Everybody called me to do this and do that. It was not exactly an easy time I had at the Cosmo Club. There were so many, many problems. My goodness!

One of the colorful characters around town was Redfield. I never met him personally, but he was pointed out to me. He hung around the Nevada Club a lot. One time I saw him going into the Nevada Club with a wheelbarrow, and

I didn't understand what he was doing there. Later on I was told that he was wheeling in the silver dollars that he owed in gambling. [laughter] He was paying off his debt with a wheelbarrow full of silver dollars!

Another story about Redfield: Safeway had an ad for cheese. It was very, very cheap, and it was a misprint in the newspaper. But Redfield went to the Safeway, and he bought up all the cheese. He wouldn't pay the price it was supposed to be—he insisted on the misprinted price in the newspaper. What he did with the cheese, I don't know. Nobody knows what he did with it. But he was quite a colorful character. He wasn't very big; he was sort of a small person. He used to wear jeans and a flannel shirt and plaid jacket of some kind—blue, red, green. I've never seen him dressed up.

Another character was Mr. Gee. Mr. Gee was a graduate of University of California, Berkeley in the 1930s. He had a good command of English. He went into the restaurant business and made a lot of friends. A lot of people knew him. He was a favorite of Pappy Smith. Mr. Gee liked to play twenty-one at Harolds Club, and Pappy Smith would come around and double or triple his bet. He lost so much money one day, he got mad, so he went and bought a ten dollar ticket in keno. He won \$25,000! [laughter] But it didn't make any difference—he lost it all back to them, anyway. Mr. Gee never married. He passed away in his late eighties four or five years ago. He knew a lot of people in Reno. He knew Lincoln Fitzgerald well. Rollan Melton and Ty Cobb wrote articles about him.

When the Civil Rights Act of 1964 passed, it allowed no discrimination in restaurants or in any public places. When that law passed, little by little the blacks and the Indians started to drift uptown, which

meant a dwindling number of customers at the Cosmo Club.

In 1966 our lease was up at the Cosmo Club. To tell the truth, I was very tired. Getting up at four o'clock in the morning and running the Cosmo Club was very demanding. The Cosmo Club was small, so I was the bookkeeper, payroll clerk, and everything. I did all the book work with the help of Bill Geyer, our CPA. I had been running the club since the passing of my husband in 1961. Besides our lease being up, there were other reasons why I closed: with the blacks moving slowly up to the bigger clubs, the operation ceased. I was getting very tired, and that affected my health, too. So I paid all the bills—I didn't owe anybody—and closed up the club.

When I closed up the Cosmo Club, my customers were all very sad and they told me they were very sorry. After I left the Cosmo Club, the property stayed vacant. Thereafter most of my customers went over to the New China or uptown. It wasn't too much later when Harrah's Club bought out the whole block from Center Street down to Lake Street, so that meant all the bars were gone. Harrah's Club also wanted to buy the Santa Fe Hotel, but the Santa Fe Hotel held out; I guess they wanted too much. [laughter] So they built around it. The Greyhound depot moved over to Stevenson Street, so Harrah's got that property. By buying up all that property, Harrah's in effect cleaned up that whole street because all the derelicts were gone; all the winos were gone; all the drunks were gone, because there weren't any more bars. [laughter]

So the Golden Club was no more; it was absorbed by Harrah's Club on Center Street. The Colony Club was no more; it was absorbed by Harolds Club and Douglas Alley. There had been some drugstores and a

buffet that was owned by a Chinese man, Tom Wong, and they were no more, either. Bill Fong's China Club even closed and moved to the El Cortez Hotel on Arlington Avenue and Second Street. Then that was gone, and the Harlem Club behind it in the alley is also gone.

I had no regrets about leaving the Cosmo Club. I was pretty tired—it was very hard work. You had to appease the public, and it was more work than I realized. I learned a great deal from the experience: I learned humility and I learned about people and their circumstances. I learned the way different people think, too—like the winos and how they think, the black people, the Indians. I learned from each of them; they taught me a great deal. There were a couple of winos that I tried to straighten out and send home, but I don't think I was able to do that. I listened to their stories, and I wondered how they became winos. One thing I learned from the black people is how hard they're fighting for a place in society. Most of them were very nice, though there were a few that were not.

Occasionally, when I am downtown I run into a few of them, those people from the old days. One, Eddie, used to chauffeur for Bill Harrah, and is retired. Then there was a bartender of mine who worked as an elevator operator out in the Nevada Hospital. Some of the others I met have since retired or passed away. But one old man is still around: that's King George, and he is 103 or something like that now. Old Smitty, my "bodyguard," died almost forty years ago. Then, of course, all the other casino owners have passed away, too, like Pappy Smith, Howard Farris, and Charlie Cowan. Len Harris, who was mayor, passed away; the police chief, Briscoe, died; Ted Berrum passed away. Anyway, I knew a lot of them.

With that generation of club owners gone, there are a lot of differences. I don't know this new generation—they're all corporations where, before, we were just a very friendly people. We'd meet and have lunch and talk about the casinos, the games, and what we could do to improve it. At the time, it was very friendly. I don't know how they operate now. I think it's all corporations, and they operate differently. We used to see Bill Harrah running through the clubs to look at his operations and see how they were doing. Of course, Pappy Smith was always there running around, too. But today I don't think you know who owns what. That's the difference. There are differences in the way the present club owners treat their customers. I think what they lack now is the relationship they once had with the customers, with the public. They're not as friendly as the old clubs were. Pappy Smith used to greet the people—they were all there in the pit, greeting customers, and that made a lot of difference. Now you don't even know who owns what. Pappy Smith always used to say, "You have to send out winners to get players," and he is right. You have to send out winners. It's the volume that counts. Also, they no longer have the amenities they used to give the public here. The old owners used to comp their big players a great deal, and now they don't seem to be doing that. They'd comp them with drinks or dinner or lunch or some show or something. After their players dropped a couple of thousand dollars, I think they were entitled to it. [laughter] Then you have to *know* your players, too. They did know their players where they don't seem to now.

AFTER THE COSMO CLUB

Tom Wong was the proprietor of the Banker's Cafe, right across from Harolds Club, near the Archway Drug Store. His father had a restaurant in Rapid City, South Dakota, and then they came out to California, where he had a restaurant in Dixon through the war years. During the war Tom said his father had a lot of government contracts to provide food, so, evidently, he did very well. Then a highway or freeway went through and took his restaurant away, so he came to Reno and bought the Banker's Cafe. The Banker's Cafe was a restaurant and also had two twenty-one tables. Tom Wong operated the club from about 1964 to 1967, when he sold it to Harolds Club.

Tom walked into my office one day and told me he had a lot of problems: he said he was being sued here and there for unpaid bills. He said, "They are paid!" I asked him how, and he told me he didn't take care of it; his wife and daughter did by paying cash for the bills. I asked him if he had receipts and he said, "After we pay them, we just throw away all the receipts. We don't owe

anybody!" So they had no proof that the bills had been paid. He said, "Will you at least help me see an attorney?" Tom's English was not fluent at all, and he needed me to interpret. I think his attorney at that time was Les Gray. Subsequently Tom had all these little lawsuits here and there to settle his debts. He owed Rauhut's Bakery on Commercial Row; he owed Model Dairy; he owed a meat company; and he owed ever so many merchants. Evidently, his wife and daughter weren't very good bookkeepers: they paid bills when they were asked, and when they were not asked, they did not pay bills. [laughter] But we settled all of it.

Then Tom went to Fallon and bought into a business, the Palace Club, where he took over the keno. Tom's investment in the Palace was \$60,000, and a man named Lockridge owned the other 50 percent interest. Tom told me something was wrong, because Lockridge would make up the bills and count all the money. In other words, Tom had no idea of how much money was being brought in; he had no control. The strange thing was . . . I

asked, "You bought into the Palace Club. Are you licensed?"

He said, "I just took over the keno."

I said, "You can't engage in gaming in this state without being licensed."

He said, "Well, I am licensed."

I said, "He's licensed, but *you're* not!" He thought that as long as the owner was licensed, that would suffice—but it didn't. So there was another lawsuit.

He said, "I want to get out of there; I want him to give me back my money."

Well, the money was already spent, so he couldn't get his money back, but he sued Lockridge. It was a *long* court case. [laughter] The judge presiding was Frank Gregory, and I have never seen a court case conducted the way it was: it looked to me like the judge was half asleep or drunk, and Tom Wong's side was never presented! The judge ruled in favor of Lockridge, and I couldn't understand why. I said, "Something is awfully wrong here. They were prejudiced and biased. How could Frank Gregory judge a case when the other side hadn't even had a chance to present their case?" So I came back to Reno and I ran into Eddie Scott, who was with the NAACP. I told him about the case. I said, "I've *never* seen a case more biased and discriminating than the one in Fallon."

He said, "It sure is. Let me talk to the Civil Liberties lawyer." We wanted to appeal the case, but meanwhile, Les Gray told us that he wouldn't be able to handle Tom's case, because he was running for the state senate and was too busy. So we went to Charlie Springer. (Charlie Springer at one time ran for governor, and my son and his friend, Kelsey Harder, painted Charlie's campaign wagon. They also knew Springer's wife, Joan, from the university; she was attending classes up there.) We explained the case to Charlie, and he agreed that it didn't seem right. We got a

court order to seal off the cash flow of the Palace Club. The sheriff of Churchill County accompanied us. We sealed the money, and we also emptied the slot machines and sealed them off. Lockridge couldn't use anything, so he declared bankruptcy. Of course, Tom Wong filed his claim there. Subsequently, the Palace Club went on the auction block and was bought by the Nugget in Fallon for, I've forgotten, how much money. So in the end, Tom Wong got his money back.

After that I said, "OK, now you are finished with your lawsuit and everything. You got your money back, so keep it and enjoy it!" But before I knew it, in 1967 he bought the Sagebrush Club in Fallon. The Sagebrush Club was owned by John Figone. It had a bar, restaurant, crap table, keno and two twenty-one tables, along with slot machines; it was a nice little compact club. The club was held in escrow while Tom applied for a gaming license. Tom asked for my and Charlie Springer's help. We went down with him to Carson City to sit in on his hearing. Of course, some of the board members already knew me, so Tom got his license, with the provision that I would help him and that his records and everything else would be in English and not in Chinese. [laughter] I was licensed as one of his key employees, so he got his license.

I wasn't actively engaged in the club's operations, because I was in Reno and Tom was in Fallon, but I got him an accountant, Bill Geyer. After the club was open about a month, Tom called me up and said, "I'm in trouble again."

I said, "What?" He told me he didn't know what his employees were doing. They'd count the money but he didn't know whether the count was right or not. I said, "What in the world? You *own* the place; you are supposed to be there to count the money!" [laughter] His employees were stealing from him! (I won't

mention their names.) I said, "Where in the world did you get this crew?"

He said, "I don't know—somebody recommended them."

I said, "Where are your fill slips and your take slips?"

He said, "What are those?" So I got him to fire the crew. (He had a pit boss who was later blackballed by the state for cheating at other clubs, too.) So Tom got another crew, and I got some new tickets for him for the club. I also got him a machine where there would be duplicates made and so forth. I said, "Now do it right!"

Then, *again* he called me up, needing my help: he didn't know how to do the payroll. He said, "You've got to come back and do the payroll for me and do the office work. I don't know what's going on." So I ended up spending eleven years up there doing his payroll, the office work, paying his bills, and everything else.

I would go to Fallon about every other week and spend a few days doing the payroll and the book work and everything with the accountant: we'd get the taxes out, the employment security, everything.

The day manager there was a chap named Chuck Oeding. He helped Tom Wong with hiring and firing and interviewing. Bob and Ethel Caudle also worked at the Sagebrush. They had twin daughters, Sheila and Sharon, two sons, Bill and George. One of the sons died. I don't remember which one. And Ethel Caudle died afterwards.

So everything went along very well, but I was tired of traveling; I wanted to quit many times. I said, "I'm going to quit! You get somebody else to do it for you. Get your daughter to do it." But she couldn't handle it, because somehow his wife and his daughter, coming from China, had a different conception of running a business.

They figured it was their business and they could do as they wanted. I tried to explain to them this was a gaming business and it was a *privilege* to do business—you have a privileged license and you do it according to rules and regulations of the gaming board, but it was too difficult to make them understand. We were just like oil and water. [laughter] I tried to impress on them how the money should be counted and the whole procedure of gaming.

The gaming board had a lot of faith in my integrity, I guess. And so did the liquor sellers: I managed to get Tom an open account with all the liquor companies based on *my* past experience with them. Of course, Tom had a very bad credit rating from before. But I gave my guarantee that *I* would be paying the bills, so we didn't have any trouble. [laughter]

Doing business in Fallon was entirely different from the Cosmo Club; the clientele was entirely different. In the neighborhood there was a jeweler, Dana Coffee, and then a dentist, Dr. McCuskey. There were attorneys—one was Mario Recanzone. He's a judge now. Fallon was a little town that had little restaurants here and markets there. They had the Kent Market. They had a stationery store. The clientele in Fallon was mostly cowboys and local people, business people, ranchers and farmers, and also young men from the Fallon Naval Air Station. The men were from different aircraft carriers, the *Enterprise* and the *Hornet*. The young, young airmen get there training there. A lot of them were around the age of nineteen or twenty, so every time they came in we had to check their I.D.'s. [laughter] They could eat at the restaurant, but to gamble, we had to check their I.D.'s. Sometimes they would miss their bus to go back to the base, so I would get in my car and give them a ride up to the base.

[laughter] Nice bunch of kids, though, not troublesome or anything. Very nice bunch. We also had the Marines, since they were doing their survival training in the area. Then every July there was a big Indian rodeo and pow-wow in Fallon. It was very interesting, because Indians came from all over the state, and the restaurant did a very good business. We always made sure to have a large pot of chili, because they loved chili.

So, the Sagebrush clientele was *very* different from the clientele of the Cosmo Club. The Cosmo Club was not easy to run. It was very stressful; there were a lot of problems. I had to deal with so many difficult situations there.

The Sagebrush was a nice little club with many reputable—and disreputable—patrons. [laughter] We were visited by Governor O’Callaghan and various state senators. Oscar Bonavena used to come to the bar. He was the boxer who was murdered outside the Mustang Ranch. (In 1976 Oscar Bonavena was reportedly having an affair with Joe Conforte’s wife, Jesse Sally Burgess. Convicted in the murder was Conforte’s bodyguard, Ross Brymer.)

The restaurant did very well. We had an interesting Chinese cook by the name of Moon. Moon was in the war, and they say he was shell-shocked; you couldn’t have a straight conversation with him, because he would go off on a tangent. But he was a good cook, and you could place a dozen orders on him, and he would get *every* one right; he had an uncanny memory for remembering orders. The food was mostly American, although, occasionally, they served some Chinese dinners. We had another Chinese cook from Los Angeles. He was there for less than six months when he got a phone call and said he had to leave to go back to L.A. because his fifteen-year-old daughter had been raped. So he went back

to L.A., and a few weeks later he called and said, “I won’t be able to come back to work. I am serving a prison term of two years for manslaughter. In the courtroom, I killed the one that raped my daughter.”

I more or less ran the Sagebrush Club, even though I only intended to stay a little while to help Tom organize it. I never could leave, though, because the next thing I knew, Tom would be begging me to come back and help him out. He’d say, “I can’t do it; I’ll have to sell the place if you don’t come back and help me!”

The Sagebrush Club had all the games: slots, keno, twenty-one, craps, and poker. Tom Wong ran the poker game—he loved to play poker. They had a good poker game with all the older people in Fallon. Even Harold Smith Sr. would drive to Fallon to play poker. When he played, it was all night. [laughter] Sometimes he would play poker for twenty-four hours, thirty-six hours, day and night. Then he would take a nap and come back and play again. He might play for a whole week like that. That was Harold Smith Sr. Tom Wong would run the table until he got tired. Then he would have somebody else run the table. Harold Smith Sr.’s favorite drink was Courvoisier. He drank up all the Courvoisier we had in the club, so the boss told me to go out to the liquor store and buy a bottle of Courvoisier to use until the liquor salesman came by. Smith had a bodyguard that drove him up in his Cadillac. If he ran out of money, why, he would send his bodyguard back to Harolds Club to get some more money. I think he lost quite a bit. He was too drunk to know what he was doing, anyway.

Finally, one night in 1978, we had a robbery at the Sagebrush Club. I was doing some work about three or four o’clock in the morning, when we were robbed by an

ex-employee. I was hurt very badly in the robbery. The man tried to kill me, because I recognized him. I landed in the hospital for a couple of weeks. First, I was in the Churchill County Hospital, but I was transferred to Washoe Medical, because they couldn't handle my injuries. Subsequently, the robber was arrested trying to flee with some of the Sagebrush money. He had over \$10,000 in a paper bag and he was trying to take the morning bus and leave for Reno, I guess, or parts unknown, but he was caught and arrested by the Fallon police. When his case came up, I had to go to court and identify him, and he was sent to prison in Carson City.

I stayed at the Sagebrush Club until shortly after I was injured in the robbery. I thought I would take the opportunity to leave the place, but Tom Wong fell ill, so I went back to help him out, and then he died. I had been injured in April of 1978, and he died in July of a pulmonary embolism; he was sixty-nine.

Tom Wong was very well liked in the community; he fit in very well. He had a great rapport with the citizens of Fallon, and they all respected him; he was a very generous man. Every Christmas and Thanksgiving he would open his restaurant to free dinners for the senior citizens. He also gave free dinners for his employees and their families. Upon his death, they had a very nice memorial service for him, and he was subsequently buried in San Francisco. Tom Wong was a member of the Gung Tong in San Francisco.

After Tom died I went to Fallon, and I tried to straighten everything out. I could have gone to the gaming board and asked for time until we could license somebody else, but I couldn't make his daughter and wife understand. So to save myself the headaches, I said, "Well, I'm going to wind up everything, and I'm going to leave the place." I wasn't going to work there under any circumstance,

because I was still suffering from some of the injuries I sustained.

When Chuck Oeding, the day manager, found out I was leaving, he said, "If you are leaving, I'm leaving, too." So two of the club's key employees were leaving; the owner was dead, and the daughter, who was not capable of doing anything, was the only key employee remaining. So to absolve myself of any responsibility, I wrote to the gaming board and told them that because of the death of the owner, I was relinquishing my position as the chief operator. I understand that the daughter continued to run the place. Once again, everything they bought there was by cash because I had told all the vendors that I was leaving. Soon the gaming board closed the gaming operation. They left the bar and the restaurant open, but they closed all the gaming and the slots because there was no licensee. Later on, the family sold the club to Dr. McCuskey, a dentist in Fallon. I haven't been back since, so I don't know what has happened. I spent eleven years in Fallon and six years in Reno. I think eighteen years or so in the gaming is enough. I'm tired! [laughter]

After my injury, I moved back into Reno from Sparks, where I was living alone in a three-bedroom house. The children decided they didn't want me to live alone, so I moved to Reno into one of the houses my son owned; it was near the southwest area on Wright Street. Then I was closer to my son, Cherky, and my daughter, Hwa-di.

THE CHINESE IN RENO

There weren't many Chinese families in Reno when we moved here, only a couple hundred Chinese here, single men, mostly working in the clubs. There were a couple of laundries and a couple of Chinese restaurants: Mr. Gee's Pagoda in Sparks and the Soy Sound. The Choy family had the Mandarin. The Sun Cafe was opened in the later 1950s, and they sold mostly American food, so it was not considered Chinese food.

Most of the Chinese lived in what they called Chinatown along Lake Street and East Sixth Street in homes that had been converted into rooming houses. A lot of the Chinese workers lived there. They lived in small apartments or shared a room together and cooked in a common kitchen. A lot of them would eat at the Mandarin Cafe, because they could get Chinese home cooking. The Mandarin Cafe was located on Lake Street where the Oxford Motel is today. Mrs. Choy did the cooking. The Choys had a lot of children, two boys and four or five girls, and the girls waited on tables. It was a family affair, family project.

Eugene Choy became a dentist. Melvin Choy is still here in Reno somewhere. All the daughters have married and are scattered here, there, and all over in California. But the Choy family are old-timers here. They were here in the 1930s. They came shortly after Mr. Gee. Gradually, Mr. Choy opened other businesses in Reno. He had another place down on South Virginia Street; then he moved out to East Fourth Street before he retired.

There was a Dr. Wong, an herbalist, who bought his own house on Sixth Street between Lake Street and Valley Road; he also practiced there. He didn't have a family, just a wife here. He also moved back to California.

Henry Yup is one who has been here a long time. He is from Lovelock and had a little coffee shop there. Then he bought a house and lived somewhere in Reno. I guess, unless you bought your own house, you couldn't rent a decent apartment because of how people discriminated. Henry Yup had what they called a malt shop at first. Later on, he had the Sun Cafe on Virginia Street in which he catered both Chinese and American food.

He and his wife retired from the restaurant business, and he and his family still live in Reno.

Once a month the Chinese workers would go back to San Francisco or Oakland to pick up groceries or supplies. We usually put in an order with them, and they would shop for us, too. Since Reno didn't have a Chinese grocery store back then, most of the Chinese went to California or sent their shopping list for staples with somebody else.

There were several Chinese pioneer families in Reno: Mr. Gee, who had a restaurant in Sparks on B Street. Mr. Gee passed away about three years ago, I think. He knew many people in Reno; he had been here since the early 1930s. Later on Mr. Gee moved his restaurant from Sparks to South Virginia with a Caucasian partner. I think his name is Conklin. They didn't get along. They had different ideas of running a business. So then he moved out to Fourth Street and Stoker where Mi Casa Too is now. He had the Pagoda there until he retired. He sold pretty good Chinese food, considering the material he had to work with, and he built up quite a clientele with the older people here. It was mostly Cantonese food. He had trouble with his cook, too. He had a very good cook named Harry. Harry loved to gamble—blackjack and craps. When he lost money, he didn't want to work. When he won money, he didn't want to work. He always got advances from Mr. Gee and he owed so much money, Mr. Gee said, "You'd better come to work and work off some of what you owe me." So he would go to work. Mr. Gee had a lot of old timers working for him. They were more reliable than the young ones, except for Harry. He was old, but he was unreliable because of his gambling.

The Tim Ko family ran the Dollar Store where Parker's is now. They were very nice. Tim Ko had a Caucasian wife, Alice, and he

was a member of the Reno Rotary Club. They were here long before we were. They lived at Keystone and Jones Street. The house is still there. Then the Dollar Store closed down. National Dollar Store is a chain of stores owned by Chinese and headquartered in San Francisco. Tim moved back to California. He was originally from Lodi, California. Later on, we heard that he passed away, but I don't know what happened to his wife.

Bill Fong and Wally Tun and my husband were a later generation that belonged to the Joss House Society. Bill Fong had the New China Club and Wally's family had motels and property they managed in town, but they had come later. Afterwards, the Chinese more or less disbanded. Since then the Choy parents have passed away, along with Mr. Gee, and Bill Fong, and my husband.

I don't know whether there were any particular places that the older Chinese of this area were buried. Most of the older Chinese were buried for a while, and then their remains were shipped back to China. That was the custom in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

A little about Henry Woo: Henry was born in China in 1860 and came to the United States when he was seventeen or eighteen. He never went back to China, and he was 105 years old when he died in Reno. Henry had retired from working on the railroad (where he knew my father), and then did some menial work at the clubs before dealing faro at the Bank Club. When he was ninety-eight years old, he was dealing faro. Then he retired. He always hung around the Cosmo Club. He liked to visit and read the Chinese newspapers, which were mostly published in San Francisco, and talk with the Chinese people. From him I learned a lot of background about the Chinese people in Nevada. Each morning he'd leave his little room on Nevada Street a little after seven

o'clock and come down to our club. From Nevada Street to the Cosmo Club was quite a walk, maybe ten blocks. He became quite a fixture in crossing Fourth Street, which had a great deal of traffic. The light would change many times before he would get across the street, because he walked very slowly with a cane. Henry became quite a well-known figure, and all the drivers would recognize him crossing the street. Sometimes we would drive him back home, and he would tell us a great deal about his life in Nevada. He worked on the railroad in Carlin and in Sparks; he also worked in the mines. He worked in some bars, cleaning up the sawdust floors. He said that was the best job because he would retrieve a great deal of money—the gold coins that the cowboys had dropped in their drunken sprees. [laughter]

Henry said there used to be a larger Chinese community here in Reno. He used to tell us that in May of each year, the Chinese would hitch up some wagons and head to Sacramento for supplies, such as Chinese foodstuffs. On these trips he would "ride shotgun." I said, "Shotgun?"

He said, "Yes, we'd been robbed by bandits and Indians." So he would ride shotgun! The wagon train would leave in May, and they arrived in Sacramento in August. After a week or two getting supplies in Sacramento, they would leave in August and arrive back in Reno in November. [laughter]

Henry had many, many tales to tell; he was very interesting. He told us a lot about different pioneers in this area. He knew George Wingfield Sr., whom a lot of Chinese knew at that time, because quite a few of them worked on his ranch. And Henry told us that the Chinese colony had cribs along the Truckee River, near the Bundox. The Joss House was also along the Truckee River for a long time, and Henry became the

caretaker for a while. One time the Truckee River crested and Henry had to climb up on the table until the Fire Department rescued him. [laughter] Anyway, later on, the Chinese people more or less disbanded, and they were scattered—some went back to China, and some went out to California.

One day in 1965, Henry Woo failed to show up at the club. On the second day when he didn't show up, I said, "Something is wrong." So one of the dealers at the club, Harry Tong, contacted one of the policemen in the neighborhood. They went up to his apartment and had the landlord open the door. They found that Henry had passed away in his sleep; he was 105 years old. I think he had been getting some welfare, so I called up the public administrator and told him the circumstances of Henry's death and asked for permission for the Joss House Society to bury him and notify his kinfolk in China. I said, "He doesn't have anything. We'll clean up his apartment and take care of his burial." The public administrator said that that was all right. That relieved the state of having to take care of it. So the Joss House Society bought his plot, bought his casket, and buried him. Then the Chinese secretary of the Joss House Society wrote a letter back to his relatives in China and notified them of his death at age 105. He had left a wife back in China, who had adopted a son. She raised him and from him had a grandson. We notified the grandson of Henry's death and sent Henry's belongings back to China. He didn't have very much. Henry never had very much money, but he used to send a few dollars back to the grandson—maybe fifty dollars once a year. And that is our Henry.

The Joss House Society was formed here by a group of men around 1870. It was a temple, a place for Buddhist worship. They

put together an altar. People would come and say their prayers, worship their ancestors, and burn incense. The upkeep was all by donations. They had a little booklet where they recorded all the donations. The Joss House Society also settled disputes among the members. To avoid going to American courts, they usually settled disputes by arbitration among themselves.

There's quite a history to the Joss House Society. We learned a great deal about it from Mr. Gee and Mr. Choy, because they were here the longest. Of course, Henry Woo told us a lot about the Joss House. They were all members. Mr. Choy at one time was very active in the Joss House Society, because he was near town. In the 1800s the Joss House Society was given a piece of land near the Truckee River by Dr. Manning and Dr. Haskell, where they built a little brick building and an altar. They called it the Joss House. The Joss House had members from Reno, Fallon, Carlin, and Elko—from all over northern Nevada. There they had their meetings and their Buddhist worship. Henry Woo was the caretaker of the Joss House there until it got flooded. The foundation was weakened, and it was condemned by the city. When we arrived here in the mid 1950s Mr. Choy said, "Can you do something about that Joss House we have?"

My husband said, "Well, Bill Fong's been here longer. Why didn't you all get together?"

Mr. Choy said, "We couldn't get him to do anything, because every time he wants to do anything, it costs money."

So, my husband looked into it. Charlie found that it was condemned and needed to be torn down. Meanwhile, Charlie was elected president of the Joss House Society, and Bill Fong was vice president. Then there was a treasurer, a Chinese secretary, and an English secretary. They couldn't find anybody to be the English secretary, so finally they elected

me. I was the first woman to hold *any* post in the Joss House Society.

And Bill Fong said, "Yes, I found somebody to tear it down for so many hundreds of dollars."

And Charlie said, "I found somebody that would tear it down for nothing. All they want for a price is the bricks." It was an old brick building. So, that's what they did. It was torn down.

Then the Bundox was built, and it took the Joss House's right of way. The only access to the property before it was condemned had been through the property of the Bundox. Charlie had a survey done on the property and found that the Bundox had built over the property line a couple of feet, but he did not go to court or file a lawsuit. They decided to sell the property to Bud Loomis [E. Frandsen Loomis], owner of the Bundox. Charlie asked \$25,000 for the piece of property, and they were negotiating, but Bud Loomis had to go out of town. He said he would proceed with the negotiation when he came back, but he died very suddenly, so the Joss House property was left in limbo.

Later, after my husband died, Bill Fong negotiated to sell the Joss House property for \$15,000 to the Bundox people. That money was put into the bank with the intention of finding another piece of property, but as the years went by we never did find another piece of property. Property was too expensive, and not only that, people started to lose interest in the Joss House Society. It was another generation of Chinese—waiters, students. The younger ones had no interest in the Joss House or such worship. Their parents were putting them through school, so they had no need of help. The last time funds were used from the Joss House Society was when Henry Woo died. The whole burial and everything cost about \$1,500.

Well, Bill Fong became president and Quong Tong became vice president. Wally Tun became treasurer, and I was English secretary. Henry Yup, Mr. Gee, and Mr. Choy were trustees. Then all the officers died but me. I was the only one left, except for the trustees.

Meanwhile, we had put some of the fund into CDs, had it roll over, and after twenty years that \$15,000 grew to about \$35,000. So then, we had a meeting—Mr. Gee, Henry Yup, Mr. Choy, and I. “What are we going to do with this money?”

So we called some of the Chinese for a meeting. Bill Fong’s widow, Ann, turned over the records that he had been in charge of, including the bank book. It was a very interesting meeting because we had some young Chinese people attend: waiters, students, people who didn’t know of the Joss House Society and its money. But when we told them about the money, they were very interested, naturally. We had a terrible argument. Some said, “Well, why don’t we split the money among ourselves?”

I said, “No.”

They said, “Well, why don’t we divide it up?”

Some said, “I can use the money; I can go to school.” But we decided that that was no solution. You couldn’t help one, because you’d have to help all of them. So that was no solution. We had a very unhappy time for quite a few months. [laughter] Then there were those who didn’t agree with us; they hired an attorney to get control of the money. But there was no way we could turn the money over to these strangers. Cliff Young was our attorney and helped with these lawsuits. (Cliff knew about the Joss House Society many, many years before, during the 1950s. He attended some meetings with us when we were trying to settle the riverside property before it was

sold.) When these people threatened to go to court to have it settled, Cliff Young wrote and said, “All right, if you want to sue us, we will go to court and we will be ready. But the court costs will be shared by you.”

Primarily, their idea was to buy another Joss House near downtown. And I said, “We haven’t got enough money to buy any property. If we put \$35,000 as a down payment, who’s going to carry the mortgage? And who’s going to pay for the utility, and the telephone, and the upkeep of the place?” I said, “Where is the money coming from?” So I vetoed that idea. “The older Chinese that were interested in the Joss House have all passed away, and this younger generation is not interested in the Joss House.” So after that they sort of decided against it. We didn’t hear from them again so we figured the case was closed.

I said, “Let’s build some kind of memorial.”

“What do you suggest?”

Well, there were a lot of suggestions: maybe dedicate a room in a hospital and call it the Joss House room, or establish a scholarship from it.

“No.”

In the end we decided that we would establish some sort of a memorial for the Chinese. We got hold of Gene Sullivan of the Washoe County Parks Department. He was a friend of Henry Yup’s, and they had both come from Lovelock, as had Cliff Young. At that time the Rancho San Rafael Park was just beginning to take shape. Henry said, “Well, we could build a pavilion there and have it memorialized.” So we went out there and looked around at Rancho San Rafael Park and agreed that we could have a pavilion and a plaque in memory of the Chinese. We understood from Gene Sullivan that the Parks Department would maintain it. So we turned the money over to the Parks Board and they built the pavilion which now stands in San

Rafael Park. It's called the Joss House Society Pavilion. (It's also known as the Pagoda.) Then we closed the account at the bank and all of us signed it: Wally, Henry, Mr. Gee and I. We were the only ones left from the inception of the money.

They had an opening ceremony when the pavilion was completed in May of 1984 or 1985. We had a dedication out there and it was very nice, though windy and a little cold. [laughter] Mayor Sferrazza spoke. We had also invited Governor Bryan, but he sent a representative, because he couldn't come. Charlie Mapes and Clark Guild and some of the older people that knew about the Joss House Society also attended. There is a barbecue pit at the pavilion for whoever wants to use it. (I understand from Gene Sullivan that it has been used quite a bit.) There is a small fee for use of the barbecue pit, but Chinese people have a waiver and don't have to pay the fee. I have used it a couple of times for children's barbecues.

Aside from the Joss House Society, there was another Chinese organization in Reno called the Six Company; there wasn't too much difference between the two. Both were for charity. Members of six families formed the Six Company: the Wongs, Kwans, Chins and Woos, and two other families whose names I can't remember. The Six Company was also formed for charity, to help each other and to help the Chinese community. The only difference was, the Joss House was a place of Buddhist worship. They had their own form of worship. A lot of the old Chinese adhered to the Buddhist religion, whereas the Chinese nowadays do not. Most of them are Christians or nothing at all. [laughter] The membership of the local Six Company Organization and the Joss House Society was pretty much the same people. Joss House and Six Company

mixed. They used to have meetings together and discuss various things, like if some family needed help or was having a problem with another Chinese family or whatever.

There were also fraternal organizations like the tong societies. There were members of different tongs in Las Vegas and they claimed that as their territory. For instance, there's the Hop Sing Tong in Las Vegas. In Reno, the workers of the New China Club and our club were members of another tong.

The Joss House Society's building was occupied by the Hop Sing Tong, but they let us use it. It's all demolished now. I know that it had a little kitchen and sometimes some of the various employees who were members of the Hop Sing Tong cooked their meals there. But all that area is gone now; it's all cleaned up and it's perfectly safe to go down there. [laughter] At one time it wasn't.

The local Six Company was not part of a national organization, although it could have been. Most cities that had large Chinese colonies, like San Francisco and New York, Chicago, and even cities in Canada, had Six Company organizations. The organizations were a social outlet and provided a way for families to settle disputes among one another instead of going to American courts. The Chinese settle disputes among themselves.

The tongs have no limit to members. Anyone could join—that is, if they accept you. At one time the tongs were very powerful; they used to have tong wars and different tongs would kill each other off like the Mafia. [laughter] But since then all the belligerent members of different tongs have passed away and the younger generations are not so belligerent; they don't have fights anymore. Mostly the tongs are more like a protective organization. If you are a member of a tong and there is some dispute like a business

dispute, then the tong would try to arbitrate and settle for you. The Hop Sing Tong is no longer in existence locally. The older generation that were members of the Hop Sing Tong have all passed away, and this younger generation doesn't belong to the tong at all. All these groups disbanded, all disappeared, for the reason that there are no longer older Chinese here. Maybe I am the oldest one. [laughter] Henry Yup and his family are still here, but we're the only ones left.

I did some work as an interpreter in court actions involving the Chinese in Chinese divorce cases, accident cases, and so forth. I have a speaking knowledge of the Cantonese Third Dialect and the Fourth Dialect, but not Mandarin. Most of the Chinese here at that time were all southerners, all Cantonese; there were very few northerners, Manchurians. Most spoke the dialect which is the more rural dialect. The Third Dialect, Cantonese, is more city dialect. [laughter] My father spoke the Fourth Dialect and mother spoke the Third. That's why I learned both.

When I acted as an interpreter, I didn't receive a fee. I guess they figured I was part of the Joss House Society, so I guess they expected it. It wasn't always a pleasant job, I'm telling you, because some of the Chinese people sometimes misinterpreted things, and I could get into a lot of trouble. However, I did quite a bit of interpreting for various Chinese and their businesses, such as their bill payments. I have gotten to know many an attorney while interpreting for the Chinese: Charles Springer, Les Gray, Cliff Young, Tom Craven and Clark Guild.

I was also occasionally called to accompany various Chinese men or women to doctors as an interpreter. Many of our employees at the club were patients of Dr. Smernoff. He had his office up on North Virginia Street and the

beauty of it was that you didn't have to make an appointment. It was first come, first served at Dr. Smernoff's office, so it was convenient for the employees, too. They also went to some doctors up on Ryland Street where there was a clinic.

The 1960 Winter Olympics were held at Squaw Valley, and I think in December of 1959 is when all the countries' participants came through Reno. We had a big parade down Virginia Street, I remember. They wanted local people to participate in the parade and represent their different countries. [laughter] Well, I marched in the parade with my husband and some others. It was very colorful because many different countries were represented, and they were marching through Reno on their way up to Squaw Valley, where they were housed. All of Virginia Street was closed, and it was very festive. They had flags all decorated. There must have been a committee to take care of all this. But we didn't go up to see any of the games up on the hill, because it was too crowded.

In 1914 my mother took us back to China, but I can't remember too much because we were so young—just tots. I think I was about four or five and my brothers were about six and four. I remember being ill because the sanitation was not as it is in the United States.

I remember the village of Hoi San was so picturesque. There were little lanterns and the doors were painted lacquer red and had red lanterns during New Year's. We had a great big chandelier in the middle of the living room, and we had teak tables and chairs with red cushions. The chandelier, as big as it was, could be lowered with a red velvet ribbon. Of course, all that was gone when we returned in 1981; everything was gone.

Later on, after I graduated from high school in 1929, I went back to China. I went back intending to go to the university in Yancheng, but it didn't happen, because I was ill—I had malaria and almost died. Plus the condition in China was a little uncertain at that time, because the warlords were fighting with the Chiang Kaishek.

I had an opportunity to go back to the village later, and I spent a month there, which was an experience. There was no electricity and no amenities such as a bathroom or a shower, and the outhouse was quite a distance away among the bamboo groves. There was a common well where water was bucketed in and put in a large crock. We also caught rain water whenever we could. In the month I spent there, I went to a wedding, had a New Year's, and went to a funeral. I also met my father's first wife, and she was very kind and very, very generous; she accepted me as a daughter. She made sure that all the sisters-in-laws and her daughter-in-law and everybody treated me well—and I *was* treated very, very well. Of course, I was known as the daughter from America and an oddity because I had American clothes on. I had the saddle shoes and bobbie socks and bobbed hair. [laughter] All the outlying village people came to our village to look at me, because I was such an oddity. Can you imagine that? [laughter] The thing is, at the time, this mother considered herself the matriarch of that family, and of

my father's second family, too. She said I was a teenager, so I was old enough to be married off, so she decided that she would take responsibility of *my* life and future! [laughter] I had a nephew at that time, the son of this brother that had died en route to Peking. He was considerably older than the rest of us. He said, "Do you know that your mother is thinking of marrying you off?"

I said "What? She can't do that! I'm American, and this is not done in America." But I stayed and kept my ears open, and so did he.

The matriarch of the family arranged a marriage for my nephew, the son of my half-brother; he was not very happy about it. He did *not* want to marry a village girl, because he had a girlfriend in Canton, in the city. He had lived in the city, and he was satisfied with her. But anyway, he ended up marrying the girl as had been arranged—sight unseen. He had never seen her. But I saw her when they brought her to our house in the sedan chair, all decorated in gold and green and silver. They had the ceremony and they were married. Shortly after that, he said, "We're leaving, before *you* get married off."

I said, "OK, let's go, let's leave!" Well, his mother did not want us to leave, but one day, unknown to them, we packed our little belongings, and we slipped out of the village. We walked and walked until we came to a station to take a train. [laughter] The train didn't run every day; it only ran on certain days and certain times—it was never on time. So we ran and we got on that train and then we took a boat back to Hong Kong. From Hong Kong, we took another boat and went back to Canton where my sister Fanny had lived for twenty-some years. Then I got ill with malaria and was in the St. Paul's hospital in Canton. Fanny was working as a secretary in Ling Nam University, and she got an American

doctor for me, Dr. Carter. I was very seriously ill, and he said if I lived through the night, I might have a chance. And I did live through the night, and I recovered.

A girlfriend I knew from California had been with us on the same boat to China. I asked for her and I learned she had died. When I told my sister that, she said, "You're going to leave!" So, instead of attending Yancheng University, I came back to the United States.

During the summer of 1936 I had a three month sojourn in Europe. My husband, Thomas Chang, and I went to the Beaux Arts School in Fontainebleau, Paris, and on our return home, we visited Munich, Germany. We were unaware that Germany was in political turmoil at that time. Being students from America, we felt that we had the run of Europe and that we were untouchable. We spent time in Munich sightseeing and enjoyed it, and we were very surprised when we realized that we had been followed as soon as we entered Munich.

Then we heard about Hitler being in Nuremberg for a big meeting. And I said, "Well, let's go to Nuremberg and see Hitler!" [laughter]

We got on the train, but before we arrived in Nuremberg, we were arrested by the Gestapo. The surprising thing about it was that we were arrested by two very well-dressed Germans who spoke fluent English with an Oxford accent. They wore tweed suits and smoked pipes—very English looking. One man pulled out his wallet and said, "We are from the Gestapo and we would like you to accompany us."

The next thing we knew, there were armed storm troopers in uniforms escorting us off the train before we got to Nuremberg, so we didn't get to see the walled city. [laughter]

We were held and questioned, but we didn't know anything. We said, "We are students. We are United States citizens, and we were just sightseeing. We had no idea what they were talking about."

They said, "You have come to assassinate Hitler!" Our luggage was turned inside out, and every garment was taken out to see if we had concealed any weapons—of course, we had none. We had no idea what was happening, and we sat in that cell there for a whole day. Finally, they said, "You are leaving Nuremberg. We will accompany you as far as Dresden, and from there, wherever you are going, you will be followed."

So, we went to Dresden, and then we went to Cologne. We decided we wanted to see the cathedral in Cologne, and we stayed there. We'd gotten to a hotel, but we knew we were being watched. While we stayed in this hotel, we were told not to look out the window, because the windows were all draped. We were told that we had to be back in the room before dark. So we sat in the outdoor cafe to have something to eat in front of the cathedral at Cologne.

At the table next to us there were some English-speaking people; they were Jews. A man said to us, "Please do not turn around. We are being watched. We know you are American tourists, and we own a camera store. We want to sell you a camera, if you would like one."

We said, "Yes, we would."

He said, "We'll sell you cameras very cheap. We are trying to get enough money to leave Germany." We asked them where we should meet them, and the man said, "We will come to your hotel with the camera; we know where you are staying."

I thought, "My goodness, what is this?"

After dinner, we walked around and noticed that on some store doors and trucks

and so forth, there were big red X marks. We asked someone about it and they said, "Those stores are owned by Jewish people." We had no idea that Germany was preparing for war—no idea! On the streets we saw a lot of little children in uniform, carrying shovels, marching; they were exercising. Can you imagine that?

All that time we didn't have any idea of what was happening. When we were going to school, we weren't interested in politics. It never dawned on us to study politics. Prince Edward's abdication wasn't even in the papers in Germany. We didn't even know of his abdication until we got back to the United States. I guess we were lucky that we were escorted out of Germany. [laughter] *Thank goodness!* We had to hide the camera that we had bought. We also were not allowed to take any German marks out of the country, so we gave them away at the hotel to anybody who wanted the money.

We went back to the China in 1979, but we weren't allowed into Canton. I visited Bangkok, Singapore, Manila, Taiwan, and Hong Kong. I didn't go into the mainland then; it was too difficult to get visas to go into the mainland. It was a long trip. I traveled with my nieces and my eldest sister in a group.

Then I went again in 1981, I think. At that time it was a little more lax, and we went to Peking, Shanghai and Nanking. We went into the mainland with a tour guide who was a member of the Communist Party. We went to Xi'an in the Shaanxi Province, where we saw those life-sized terra cotta soldiers that were being excavated there. There were thousands of them! Emperor Qin Shi Huang had been buried with these terra cotta soldiers. [Qin Shi Huang's dynasty was 259-210 B.C. In 1974 peasants digging a well accidentally discovered life-size terra

cotta soldiers, chariots, and horses, as well as bronze weapons. In three pits 7,000 warrior sculptures carved with intricate detail were discovered—lined up in battle formation and buried with the emperor for his journey to the afterlife.] Unfortunately, no cameras were allowed.

Then we went to Nanking and Soochow. It's beautiful country there. We saw the Yangtze River and we climbed the Great Wall, and my ninety-something-year-old sister went up to the fourth tower without any effort while I was panting. [laughter]

Then we went to the Ming Tomb, and we saw the Jade Palace, and we saw the empress dowager's marble boat at the summer palace. While we were there, we saw some paintings in the museum.

There, I learned a little history: my eldest sister told me our family is from the Han Dynasty. She had learned it from my mother, and my mother had learned it from her elders. Our ancestors were in the Han Dynasty Court, and the emperor there at that time was so jealous of all the intellectuals that he had a lot of them beheaded. Instead of staying around him to be beheaded, our ancestors started to emigrate. Some went east, and some went elsewhere within China. Our ancestors went south and landed in the village where my great, great, great grandfather established himself. The history of the people in that village is registered in a book that has been in the temple for generations. Even if you went overseas, and you sent back the birth dates of your sons, they were registered in the book.

But during the communist regime, the temples were burned, and the books were all destroyed in the villages; all the ancestral history was destroyed.

That year (1981) we managed to get a visa to go into Canton, and we were watched very closely—very, very closely. And the

taxicab that we hired had to have two drivers. One checked up on the other to see that no one took bribes. The province is called Guangdong, and the city of Canton is now called Guangzhou. We went from Hong Kong by train. Bick Chee's son Keurng was driving the city bus in Canton, so he knew the routes. We stopped at several places and asked about the routes, and wherever we stopped we were interrogated. They check your passport and look through your luggage and examine everything in your purse. The roads were very rutty and full of potholes, so we just jogged along. It took us about four or five hours, maybe six hours to get to the village. It wasn't that far, only a hundred and something miles.

I found a lot of changes from when I had visited as a little girl. The three houses that my father had had built were still there, but only one was occupied. The other houses were stripped bare. The windows that had had steel frames—the steel was gone, and all the gate on the doors were gone. Inside the house, all the furniture was gone. Everything was gone. There were a lot of cobwebs.

Some elders came by, and I told them who we were, and they said, "Oh, I remember you. I remember when you were here so many years ago, when you were a little girl."

And I said, "Yes, I've come back to see the village." So they took us around and told us that everything in the village was stripped bare, and the temple was stripped bare, and all the documents they had had there were all destroyed by the communists. The communists took furniture and everything. There wasn't anything left.

One couple, two children and an old woman, Edna May, were living in the middle house, and I went into the home, and the mother-in-law came to talk to me. She said, "Now that you are back, you want us to move?"

"Oh, no," I said. "No, I didn't come back to evict you. No." I said, "You can live here as long as you want."

And she said, "Oh, thank you!" She almost humbled herself and the son was bowing to me. I got so embarrassed.

So, I told the village elder, "Well, this couple is part of the family—a younger generation of Eng in the village. They have no place to live, so they live in that house." I said, "Well, let them live here as long as they wish. They need not pay any rent. If I should hear of anyone asking them for rent for our house, I shall be very upset and displeased."

They said, "Oh, very well; they can stay here." In that village, they are all Engs, and they all come from one common ancestor. As far as I know, this family is still living in the house.

The house has a center living room and two kitchens, one on the left and one on the right of the living room. And there's a bedroom on one side, and a bedroom on the other side. The reason for that is that the older married mother lives on one side, and the other side is for the daughter-in-law when the son marries. So, the houses are in two parts with one center living room. In the living room there is a skylight, and there's a courtyard where they have big water jugs to catch the rainwater whenever it rains. The house is made of a very thick sandstone, and the courtyard looks like granite, very heavy stone in thick, square slabs. In the courtyard they have an area for washing the vegetables, and there's an opening where the water goes. About twenty feet away there is a pond that has fish and ducks in it. And there is a fresh water well. And there is a big tower. On top of the houses, there's like a lookout. There is a loft and a lookout, because there was at one time a lot of bandits that were coming down from the hills. They raided and salvaged the

villagers. And so, those lookouts in the tower there were for watching for bandits coming down the hill. If they saw bandits they would prepare for a fight. Even the women—they'd have their cleaver and their bamboo stick ready to fight the bandits. For awhile, way before the war, banditry was very prevalent.

And each house has a little built-in altar, an ancestral altar, where they offer prayers and burn incense. As the males in the generation pass away, their names get put on the ancestral altar. The only thing the communists couldn't remove was the altar. It was fastened down so tight, they couldn't remove it. It was too heavy. So that was left. But everything else was stripped down. The beautiful chandelier that we had in the living room was taken. I don't know what ever happened to it. The teak chairs and tables that we had were all gone.

There are three doors at the opening—three different types of doors. One door is sort of like a gate or a security door. It slides open. Then we have a screen door, and then a solid door to close out the cold or the heat.

Then, on the side of the houses there are places where you put the lanterns and the candles, and they had panels where they put a good saying. In the old days, we used a kerosene lamp in the living room for light, and there was no heat, just the stove. You go to bed when the sun goes down. You get up when the rooster crows.

I couldn't get used to it. I said, "Time to go to bed already? It's seven o'clock!" And then, you'd get up at four o'clock when the rooster crows. I had a flashlight with me and I used that flashlight until the battery wore out. And of course, there were no sanitary facilities. Well, there was a common outhouse. It's a huge bamboo building way off among the bamboo grove there. It's a common outhouse for everybody. You empty your chamber pots in that outhouse. Everybody had chamber

pots. We had maybe two or three. So every day the chamber pots were emptied into this outhouse. It's a huge place dug into the ground, and after a certain time, the dirt is flung over it and you start all over again on top of the dirt. It's pretty deep. And there are planks running across it. You have to be careful you don't fall in. That was strange. I went and took a look. And the stench! I ran away. I said, "Gee, no running water, no flushing toilet." I was introduced to the chamber pots.

I have been back there four times, 1979, 1981, in 1984, and then, the last time in 1992.

The third time I went back to China, in 1984, we were allowed to go into the mainland by ourselves. We visited the hospitals in Canton and you wouldn't believe . . . the stairways were filthy dirty, and in the operating rooms all the instruments were exposed and lying on dirty trays. My friend Rusty was traveling with us and said, "I hope to God I don't get sick here." These were deplorable conditions! During this trip I also looked up some relatives—a great grand niece, Bick Chee, and a couple of elderly nieces.

For over twenty-five years, the Chinese mainland had no outside communication with the rest of the world at all. But many of the overseas Chinese did receive word from some of their relatives in Communist China. (Tom Wong's father and mother lived under the communist rule and had all their possessions taken away from them, because they were old and could not participate in the government. It ended up that the both of them decided it wasn't worth living and they committed suicide.) Well, our village was under communist rule and they destroyed everything and confiscated all the farmland that our relatives had. Whatever you had in the house that was removable or saleable was removed—even the steel doors were removed.

It was a terrible time in China, we learned later.

We also found another grand niece. Her son tried to escape to Hong Kong through Macao, but he was caught by the communists and brought back to Canton. He was sentenced to three years at hard labor in eastern China for trying to escape. We found this niece living in an apartment house built of concrete; it was very bleak and stark. We knew that they lived in that area, but we had no idea which apartment. So we stood out in the street and yelled her name and said, "If you live here, please answer." [laughter] That's how we found them. We climbed seven floors to the top to her apartment. (The staircase was so narrow, it was only one person at a time.) There were no lights—you had to use a flashlight or a cigarette lighter or whatever you had in order to see while climbing the stairs.

In the apartment they had a table and couple of chairs and two beds made of boards with bamboo mats on top. There was a tiny stove for cooking and a community bathroom with no bathtub—just a lavatory and a basin. The stove was more or less community, too, because there were other families living on the same floor. [laughter] Looking at the conditions, we felt very humble when we came away. We tried to give them some money, but we had mostly currency. They said, "Don't give us U.S. money because they will want to know where we got it, and then they will be blackmailing you to send them more money." Can you imagine that? So we gave them Hong Kong money, but we didn't have very much. When you realize the condition in which they had to live . . .

Our family had quite a few acres of farming land before Deng Xiaoping (Teng Hsiao-Ping) came into power. When Mao Tse-tung was still alive all of the people's produce went to the government. The

government would allot you so much per house, per person, providing that person had worked within the work force. If you were too elderly or incapable of working, you were not given any allotment, so the members of the household had to share their allotments with the disabled. Consequently a lot of old folks died because there wasn't enough food. Each person was allowed less than a square meter of cloth for clothing per year. Consequently they had a lot of patch-over-patch clothing. But later after Mao Tse-tung died in 1976 and Deng Xiaoping took over, the government became more lenient. It was decreed that two-thirds of the crops produced on government land went to the government and you kept one-third. Furthermore, you could trade with your neighbors. If you were growing rice and your neighbors were growing sweet potatoes or whatever, you could trade. Also, more material was allowed for clothing. So they were better off, and the people were better fed, and the rules were relaxed. But still there was a lot of spying; neighbors trying to get into better relationship with the government or asking for favors.

On this third trip, we also went to Bangkok; Bangkok had improved, and I was surprised. The streets were cleaner since the last time we'd visited in 1979. On my first visit to Bangkok, the streets were dirty and full of chuck holes. People were poor and there were so many motorcycles and traffic with no rules or regulations. But on the second trip, Bangkok was much improved. It was cleaner and they had a new airport and the streets were wider. Even the people were better dressed. That was very, very interesting.

After Bangkok, we went to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and that is really a beautiful city. Everywhere you go in the airport and even in the ads they have the slogan, "Drugs Mean Death." (Kuala Lumpur and Singapore frown

on any drugs. If you are caught with just even a tiny bit, you are arrested. A great many people tell us that all the dealers are executed with just a short trial.) [laughter] Kuala Lumpur is such a beautiful, clean city. They have a law against littering and spitting on the sidewalks, or else you will be fined heavily. In Singapore you are fined \$250 if you litter a sidewalk. Consequently the sidewalks and the streets are clean. The weather is beautiful there; it is nice and warm. English is quite prevalent there, so you can get along very well. (I think in Singapore, English is practically the second language.)

The last time I went to China, in 1992, traveling was better. The roads were kind of paved. We had a bus, and then Bick Chee's son Keurng took us. He knows his way around Canton and the village and the province.

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